

SIR JOHN FRETWELL (Sir John Emsley Fretwell)

GCMG (1987), KCMG (1982), CMG (1975)

Career Outline

born 1930

1953 Joined Foreign Office

1954 Posted to Hong Kong

1955 Third, then Second Secretary Peking

1957 Foreign Office

1959 Second, then first Secretary Moscow

1962 Foreign Office

1967 First Secretary (Commercial) Washington

1971 Counsellor (Commercial) Warsaw

1973 Head of Trade Relations Department

1973 Head of European Integration Department (Internal)

1976 AUSS

1980 Minister, Washington

1982 Ambassador to Paris

1987-90 Political Director and Deputy Permanent Under-Secretary

Interview of Sir John Fretwell by Jane Barder on 15 February 1996

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It is the 15 February 1996, my name is Jane Barder and I'm talking to Sir John Fretwell at his home in London. Sir John retired from the Diplomatic Service in 1990 as Political Director of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and Deputy to the Permanent Under Secretary. His last overseas post had been as Ambassador to Paris. He was appointed CMG in 1975, KCMG in 1982 and GCMG in 1987. Sir John was born in 1930. Your education, Sir John?

JF: I came from a relatively modest background, not one that one would normally associate, in those days, with a future diplomatic career. I grew up in a northerly industrial town, Chesterfield. Both my grandfathers had been coal miners; I don't mean colliery owners but coal-face workers. My parents never occupied positions of great eminence in this world, although they were ambitious for their children, and incredibly dedicated, hardworking and thrifty. I followed the normal route of a relatively bright child in those days. I went to the local grammar school. It was there that I discovered various career prospects, which one dreamed of even though they were entirely outside our experience. I came across the existence of something called the Diplomatic Service and the position called ambassador. It struck all of us that this sounded an extremely glamorous life. We knew nothing about it, we didn't know how to join it, but we did understand one thing, which was that there was a system of competitive examinations, and if there was one thing that we thought that we were all rather good at it was passing examinations. So it was probably around the age of 13 that this thought first dawned.

I finished school at sixteen and a half, having taken so many examinations that there was nothing more that I could do, and then had a year to fill in before I could start my military service, which was the normal compulsory pattern in those days. I was advised by my future college, King's College, Cambridge, to spend it in Lausanne. I had an extremely agreeable year; life was an enormous contrast to an industrial town in the north of England, with war time shortages still persisting after the war, and it was a very fulfilling experience. It gave me some understanding of life outside the UK and relations with other countries. It certainly reinforced the thought I'd had of the Diplomatic Service that it seemed to be a desirable path to follow. Although whenever I mentioned this thought, the question that immediately arose from everybody was, "Is your father in the Service?" From an early stage one met the notion that it was something of a closed circle and that if you did not have a diplomatic background, you would probably find yourself looked upon slightly askance. In the end it did not prove to be so. But that was a widespread feeling and I think you would still find it to this day. If someone said that they would like to join the Diplomatic Service, a lot of people would say, "Is your father in the career?"

JB: Did this ambition affect what you read at Cambridge? What did you read at Cambridge?

JF: I read modern languages, French and Russian. Not specifically because I wanted to go into the Diplomatic Service, because I knew enough about it by then to know that you could just as well qualify with mathematics or history as you could with modern languages, and that the Service would expect you to manage languages as they came along. I did it because I enjoyed them, and at school had found that I was quite good at them and so it seemed a natural route to follow. As time went on at Cambridge I became less interested in the purely linguistic side and more interested in the history. So it was relevant to a future career.

Even at Cambridge and doing reasonably well, I still regarded the Diplomatic Service as a very long shot. The service admitted about 18 a year at that time and one heard of there being a thousand candidates - what looked like incredible numbers of bright and brilliant people, who seemed to be

headed in that direction. So one simply looked at it as something worth having a go at, with no particular expectation of being accepted.

JB: But you still had to pass the exams and you were accepted?

JF: Indeed, yes. That particular attribute did not fail me.

JB: So you entered the Diplomatic Service in 1953 and did a year in the Office and went to Hong Kong.

JF: I had just taken a very good degree in Russian and I assumed that they would want to use me in Moscow. This was at the time when the Office had just adopted the policy of specialisation. This arose curiously from the Abadan Oil Crisis, when Mossadeq nationalised the great refinery at Abadan and threw the Middle East and the British oil industry into turmoil. The Foreign Office reached the conclusion that they should have foreseen those problems more clearly and taken more effective action to forestall them and that their inability to do so arose from lack of expertise on Iran and on oil. They adopted a new policy that everybody joining the Diplomatic Service was to become a specialist. They were to spend their first 20 years, broadly speaking, covering a particular country or area of specialised interest. The incentive offered was that if you became a genuine specialist you would have accelerated promotion. So everybody immediately volunteered to become one of the specialists, I planned to say that I had just spent three years learning Russian, so I might just fit in as one of the Soviet specialists. Before I got out my second sentence they said, "We are delighted that you want to be a specialist, you start Chinese tomorrow". I gulped. I didn't even have anywhere to live. I shot off and found some digs and duly started learning Chinese.

JB: So after that year in Hong Kong, elaborating on your Chinese, you then were posted to Peking which you had expected.

JF: Yes, indeed. I arrived there with two other Diplomatic Service colleagues who had come straight out from London; they were also Chinese language students. The three of us went into China together; we crossed the famous bridge from Hong Kong under the gaze of Mao, fifteen portraits in a row, under the guns of the People's Liberation Army, up to Shanghai and then on to Peking.

JB: By train?

JF: By train, yes. I think the two years I spent in China, at that time, were the most intense experience I've had in the whole of my diplomatic life. So much was happening on the personal front and on the work front. On the personal front, because it was for me the first experience of working at all. The first time I had done a job as distinct from being a student. It was the first experience of having some form of responsibility, it was the first experience of an oriental civilisation in its full magnificence. It was my first experience of Communism; and Communism was in a state of considerable turmoil.

These were the years when Mao was still behaving rationally and was introducing reform after reform in China, shepherding the peasants into lower level co-operatives, turning all the banks into peoples' structures or organisations, whatever names they were given, creating a vast and apparently effective new system of education throughout China and generally keeping the place in a state of agitation. I was very fortunate that my two years there coincided with the period of the slogan, "Let the hundred flowers bloom and the hundred schools of thought contend". Mao tended to run China by slogans, at least this gave the watch-word for the Party and the Government as to what they should focus on. They had finished the period of eliminating the landlords and the country to that degree was in a more peaceful state.

During the period of the hundred schools of thought they were very confident about what they were doing and very keen to let the outside world, up to a point, know about it and see it. So we were able to travel very extensively in China. Unlike the Soviet Union they did not, at least at that time, go in for dirty tricks against individual travellers, so we travelled simply by ourselves. I had a month wandering through North West China, up through Sian and Lanchow, and the next year I remember going down southward to Chengdu and Chungking and back down through the Yangtse gorges. So it was actually a thrilling time to be there and the impact of the beauties of ancient China is enormous. The golden roofs, the beautiful blue of the Temple of Heaven, wandering through the western hills, around the Ming Tomb valley. Whatever the rules said, I think we were supposed to be restricted to twenty-five miles from Peking - we totally ignored them and set off on expeditions as far as we could get, we even went a hundred miles out to the western Chung tombs. The Chinese must have known what we were doing but they never reprimanded us. So it was a fairly relaxed time to be there.

JB: We were the only major Western power with a Mission in Peking at that time?

JF: That's right, yes. The Swiss were there, the Netherlands, Norwegians and Swedes. I think that was the limit of western representation. The Russians and the East Europeans were there in force and so were some of the South Asians, India, Pakistan Ceylon, Indonesia. It was the period of the heightened neutral Third World tendency which the Chinese did a great deal to encourage. The era of Sukarno and Nehru. So that very strong trend in Chinese foreign policy was to cultivate this group of countries. We were looked upon as being not quite the enemy but it certainly was not a particularly friendly relationship. Of course, I went out there in 1955 which was only two years after the Korean War and even in that time there was an appalling incident when an airliner was shot down over the coast of China and that was never satisfactorily cleared up. So relations were a little tense and at the time of the Suez Affair, in 1956, they became distinctly tense.

The Chinese put two million demonstrators past the British Embassy as there was no one else there to demonstrate against. It gave us a moment or two of anxiety. At one stage the staff of the People's Daily burst into the Embassy and shouted and chanted and threatened us in various ways. Our Chargé d'Affaires, Con O'Neill, had to go out and try to harangue them into understanding what was happening, behaving themselves and leaving the Embassy, and he took me as his interpreter. It was a severe test of my Chinese. But more awesome was the great demonstration in Tienanmen Square which was not more than a hundred and fifty yards from the Embassy. We heard them forming up and being harangued by Chinese orators, hour after hour, about the wicked deeds of the British, finishing with a great universal shout of a million voices, "To the British Embassy!" Our Chargé, Con O'Neill, was a very cool customer and said that two of us must go and stand out there and receive them.

JB: As volunteers?

JF: As volunteers, well no. There was a firm process of selecting the volunteers. We stood and waited for the arrival of a million raucous, angry demonstrators. We were very much comforted as they approached us by the sight of their twenty leading, extremely elderly Chinese, with white beards and long cloaks in the tradition of the ancient Mandarin scholars, who, in a very courteous way, gave us a written protest about British actions and slowly moved on. This continued for about 48 hours and some of the younger demonstrators were rather less courteous and tended to throw their protests at us rather than hand them over. We took it in turns to receive these, and we survived the 48 hours, and the demonstration passed on into history. I think that, in a sense, it was quite a good way for the Chinese to let off steam and to show their Arab friends that they took it all very seriously, that they were putting pressure on the British Government, without in fact doing any serious harm.

JB: Was there a strong bilateral content to the relations? What was the bilateral relationship?

JF: Between Britain and China? Cool. They were still in the process of sequestering the old British businesses which had been based in China for countless years, and they had various techniques whereby they built up tax claims against them until the tax claims equalled their assets. The last British residents in North China had been squeezed out. I think I actually buried the last British resident in North China who died in Tientsin, in the middle of the Chinese winter. There were still a number left in Shanghai, and I think a few managed to hang on until better days came many years later, but the vast majority had left.

There was a continuous exchange of protests between us and the Chinese. At least we were protesting to them about what they were doing with their sequestrations and we were reserving all our rights to future history. I don't suppose that it made very much impression on them. However, duty was done. Beyond that we tried to talk to them a little about international affairs.

JB: Did we act in any way as surrogates for the Americans?

JF: Only to a limited extent. I suppose we did technically represent them there and occasionally had to act on their behalf, in such matters as the American prisoners who had been detained in North Korea, and one or two individuals arising from the Korean War, both British and American, who'd settled in Peking and occasionally came our way. But relations between the United States and China were so bitterly hostile that there really wasn't anything to communicate to each other, apart from occasional formal documents. At times it looked as if the sky was lightening a little, arising partly out of the Polish and Hungarian events in 1956. We found we had some things to discuss with the Chinese on a slightly broader canvas than bilateral matters, and of course we were utterly fascinated by what was happening in Chinese-Soviet relations, where Mao reacted very strongly to the 20th Party Congress and started to lay down the law on what was the proper Communist stand point on these great issues of the cult of personality and the history of Joseph Stalin. This gave us the opportunity to delve into Chinese thinking on that subject.

About this time (or to put it more in sequence, earlier in '56 with the Khrushchev-Bulganin visit to London) there was a distinct improvement in Anglo-Soviet relations, which was reflected in Peking, where we started to have social contact with the Soviet Embassy. We showed them some outrageous film and they showed us, I remember, a performance of Romeo and Juliet. But the whole question of what was really happening was an enigma. Did they intend to deceive the West? Were they really in cahoots and just pretending to be divided, or was this the beginning of a tremendous fundamental split? Was it something which could be relatively easily patched up? This was intellectually a fascinating question on which I spent much of my time, having some knowledge of both Russian and Chinese. I think we got the answer right and we judged correctly that the Chinese would never again subject themselves to the authority of a sort of big brother, an ideological superior who would give them the rules of what was Communism and how Communist countries should behave, and that having once asserted that they made their own judgements and they would never go back again. Indeed Chinese-Soviet relations started to go into a steady decline. Khrushchev dramatically, this was a year or two later, withdrew all of the Soviet experts from China leaving their economy in considerable chaos. I don't think that they ever really fully got together again after that.

JB: So you were sorry to leave in 1957?

JF: I was utterly fascinated by China and hoped to come back to the Foreign Office and to continue working on Chinese affairs. Like most of the keen young men in the Embassy at the time - we were all bachelors, one of whom was Douglas Hurd who later became Foreign Secretary - we all thought that

we'd write books about China and in later years one or two did so. I'm afraid I never did. When I got back to London I was put in charge of Aden and the Yemen in what was then called the Eastern Department, and a greater contrast than that you could hardly imagine. So I spent two years working on the affairs of the Yemen which was actually quite interesting. We had a minor war going on between Aden and the Yemen at the time.

JB: Aden was still a British colony?

JF: Aden was still a British colony at the time and the Aden protectorate was a slightly amorphous relationship, semi-independent tribes and rulers, stretching out to the Yemen border and indeed beyond. The Yemenis always said that there wasn't a proper border and that they had as much right to be in Beihan as we did, but the Sharif of Beihan did not agree and we backed him against them. So there was a certain amount of shooting going on at the border and sorties by the RAF. It was part of the much broader Middle Eastern scene because the younger member of the dynasty of the Yemen, the Imam's older son, Prince Badr, threw in his lot with Nasser and the modern anti-imperialist Arab world. We puzzled for a long time over what to do about him and finally decided to invite him to London and give him a glorious reception, the main result of which was that we all acquired bags of Yemeni coffee beans, raw. Prince Badr was pro for a time but I don't think that we really did much for relations. But it seemed to be worth trying at the time. That situation dragged on for many years until finally we did negotiate our way out of Aden and it became independent and finished up by being more Communist dominated than the Yemen itself ever became. But it was my first taste of policy making in the Foreign Office and one learnt quite what a paper blizzard life is in the Foreign Office, even for something relatively minor like the Yemen. It created an enormous amount of paper work.

JB: Were the hours then as long as they are now?

JF: No, I think I did my job on the Yemen roughly speaking between 9 o'clock in the morning and 6 o'clock in the evening, so by modern standards that was an extremely undemanding role. However, I was simultaneously a resident clerk in the office. This was the system under which four, at that time relatively young, officials manned the Office during the night broadly speaking between seven in the evening and eight the following morning. With four of you it worked out that you did one night a week each and one weekend per month each, if you were all there. Much of the time of course, one would be away on a conference and one would be posted and not replaced, so it was not unusual for there only to be two. One particular week I was on my own. You weren't up all night but any emergency telegram which came during the night you had to get up and deal with.

JB: And had to decide whether to wake up the great men about it. Do you have experiences of waking some of them up?

JF: Quite a few yes. My years there, 1957-1959, covered the very serious Middle Eastern crisis of 1958, in which it appeared that a very friendly government was being swept away, when Nuri-el-Said was murdered in Iraq and Jordan appeared to be tottering and Lebanon was expected to follow. In the course of one dramatic night the British Government decided to fly troops into Jordan and the Americans flew troops into Lebanon. Doing that in the middle of the night meant assembling the people to take the decision, getting the Foreign Secretary and Prime Minister out of bed and getting the decisions put into effect. The final drama of that particular night was finding that the Israelis were threatening to shoot down the planes as they went over, so it all had to be called off until they could be squared and they had a lot of demands to make. All of this was highly dramatic. There were a number of such occasions during the years, so I did see the central machine operating. Selwyn Lloyd was Foreign Secretary at the time and Harold Macmillan was Prime Minister and the person who played

quite a role in the decision making was the Cabinet Secretary, Sir Norman Brooke, who would install himself in the Foreign Office. I suppose he was the Prime Minister's man, really. Although private secretaries from No 10 already had considerable significance, it was the Cabinet Secretary who came and operated for the Prime Minister and personally consulted him on the telephone.

JB: So then from there you finally used your Russian because you went on to Moscow, in 1959?

JF: Yes, after two years as a resident clerk. They were a bit of a marriage market, the resident clerks, they had a nice little flat in the Office and a good base for when you were not on duty all night, so I duly joined the queue and got married after my two years there before being posted to Moscow. I arrived in Moscow at the end of 1959 and had my first experience in 40C temperatures. Compared to Peking, Moscow was incredibly dull visually. There was not that much to see or to rejoice the heart. Shopping was primitive. I don't know how the wives put up with it, but in one way or another they did. We had the excitement of the work in the Embassy. That again was a really exciting time.

JB: But for Mary (Fretwell) that was her first experience as a diplomatic wife?

JF: Absolutely, yes. She was 19 and took to it like a duck to water. So all was well. In the Embassy we were busy. I suppose our main role was trying to grasp the essence of Khrushchev's policies and to assess how far they were possibly leading the world back into war. With hindsight and in particular, as Khrushchev started to be looked upon as rather a cuddly, podgy, jovial fellow, it is difficult to recall what the atmosphere was in those days. But it really was quite tense. I recall the evening that he appeared in a Lieutenant-General's uniform, on television, to announce that he was resuming nuclear testing in the atmosphere. There was a shudder around the world at that particular moment and that series of Russian tests was very extensive. It did all raise fears about what he was really intending to do, because this was also the point when he built the Berlin Wall and cut Berlin off from the world and appeared to be intending to squeeze it dry, in his own terms. It was the build up, although that came after my time in Moscow, of the Cuban crisis which was again an extremely sharp and dangerous moment of confrontation. But during my time there it was the Berlin problem.

JB: You must have been, the Embassy must have been, in very close contact with the Americans?

JF: Extremely close, yes. Indeed at one stage we were supposed to be conducting a joint negotiation with the Russians about Berlin. It never worked out satisfactorily as a joint negotiation, but we were in extremely close touch with them, in Moscow, London and Washington. I think, looking back, that our assessment was not too far off the mark. One particular incident which touched boiling point was the U2 incident, in 1960, when the American reconnaissance aircraft was shot down over Siberia, just two or three days before the long planned summit in Paris, between Khrushchev, Eisenhower, Macmillan and de Gaulle, and Khrushchev walked out of it. Again one wondered whether the world was going to crumble into disaster. Our judgement at the time was that although Khrushchev was bombastic, impetuous, unpredictable, he did not intend to involve the world in nuclear conflict. He intended to squeeze the maximum advantage for the Soviet Union out of every conceivable situation and keep the borders of the empire in good repair, eg by sealing off Berlin, and simply exploit any situation which arose anywhere in the world where he could grab some advantage for the Soviet Union and disadvantage for the West. Disadvantage for the West, whether it be in Egypt, supporting Nasser or in Cuba, letting Castro be a great thorn in the flesh of the Americans, this was his policy and would involve one in frequent bouts of tension. But we judged that he did not actually intend to go over the brink, that he was not mad in the way that Hitler was mad. I think that this was evident at the time.

JB: Did the ambassadors, or indeed others, have personal contact with Khrushchev?

JF: Yes, Khrushchev was accessible. For instance he came to the Queen's birthday party on one occasion. He was seen around town a good deal. He would be at other major national day parties; when ministers came to Moscow he'd see them and the Ambassador would go along. So he was not sealed away.

JB: Did this mean that more junior members of the Embassy had contact?

JF: With your opposite number in Foreign Ministry. Beyond that there was good contact for the commercial and cultural sides of the embassy, who had their own particular sphere of people with whom they had authorised contact. But for the rest of us, who were working on the political relationship, it was much more difficult because experience, sadly, proved that if you engaged in private contact with Russians, invariably it turned out that they were already acting for the KGB or they were very quickly forced into doing so. This did poison any form of personal relationship and all the people who thought that they could very cleverly defy this, that they were the exception, that this lovely girl they just happened to find themselves sitting next to at the cinema was a private contact which was perfectly safe; that all finished the same way. It even turned out that the Russians would half empty the cinema to put that girl there, so human contacts were rather limited. One could travel, with a great deal of effort because you had to book everything well in advance but they didn't tell you until 48 hours in advance that you were authorised to travel, so it was hard work to organise a trip but we did manage quite a few.

JB: It was a claustrophobic atmosphere and you were probably quite glad when your time there came to an end and you moved on?

JF: Again it was the thrill of the work and the subject matter balanced against this feeling that you were always followed. There was so little that you could actually do outside the office other than entertain other diplomats or visitors or journalists and try to keep yourself busily occupied doing that. But the subject matter made it worth while. It was a little bit of a relief when we drove out through Leningrad and crossed the border into Finland.

JB: You were then posted back to London to the Foreign Office?

JF: Yes. I had a spell doing work, which I'll be a little cautious referring to although I think they are in the public domain now. I was one of the Foreign Office liaison officers working with the Secret Intelligence Service trying to ensure that they didn't do things that we didn't want them to do and that we knew what they were doing and that they knew what our policies were and what they should be trying to do. I did about 18 months of that and then moved into the Northern Department, which was in effect the Soviet and East European Department and worked on the Soviet Union for a further three and a half years.

The whole five years fitted together, as Soviet affairs were at the heart of them. Major tension and drama under Khrushchev, especially the Cuban crisis, but also progress on the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty and the agreed restrictions placed on anti-ballistic missiles; followed by the less dramatic forms of confrontation after Brezhnev succeeded him in the coup of October 1964. Tension remained high in and around Berlin, but the negotiated agreements on arms control marked the first tentative steps towards a more stable long term relationship. Major trade deals were still more of a lure than a reality. The struggle for influence in the third world was unabated. Day-to-day relations were much affected by spy scandals, especially when the Russians seized real or alleged western agents to exchange for their own convicted spies. The immense Soviet espionage effort was felt to be very menacing and there was a sense of vulnerability in trying to contain it in a free society. Their well known successes -Burgess,

Maclean, Vassall, Blake and so on did a lot to poison the climate of relations. One wonders whether it was all worthwhile for them. Admittedly, we were not totally inactive either!

By the end of those five years, I felt that the danger of war had receded but that the endless grind of confrontation, with inevitable crises, was set to continue indefinitely. The Russians still seemed intent on retaining their post-war acquisitions, with whatever brutality might be required, and on displacing the West by fair means or foul whenever the opportunity arose. There were some hopeful shoots, but they would take a long time to grow.

JB: So that was all your time in London. So during that time you had in London, it was the time that the Commonwealth Relations Office and the Foreign Office merged. Did that have any impact on you?

JF: Remarkably little. I was barely conscious of it happening.

JB: Did the Unions get into a state about it?

JF: I think that there was some concern about how careers were going to be meshed together, whether some would be disadvantaged, whether some would be given artificial promotion and so on. But it didn't have any impact in my part of the Office or the work that I was doing, nor indeed did it seem to affect the conduct of our foreign relations very much. We lost one Secretary of State: instead of having a Commonwealth Secretary and a Foreign Secretary they merged. It seemed to go administratively quite smoothly and the two services seemed to fit together perfectly well. One wondered why they had been so separate for so long. How far it was really successful in terms of fully integrating affairs, I'm not sure because backgrounds were different. In the Commonwealth Office people on the whole had been in English speaking countries and hadn't had to bother so much with foreign languages. They dealt with countries which, on the whole, were rather friendly, with some exceptions and some difficulties, but nevertheless, compared to being in the Soviet Union, it was a different proposition. You were not dealing with a country with which you feared global conflict. It would be more of a question for one to put to people who had been in the Commonwealth Office, how successfully they thought the integration took place and how quickly they were able to slot into the interesting positions of overseas Embassies. I think a certain degree of separation continued in fact, if not in theory, simply because people were qualified to do some jobs rather than others. I would have been completely hopeless if I suddenly found myself over in Australia or Canada because I had no background of such a relationship or how to handle it. I think by now distinctions have long since faded away. People move easily between Delhi, Paris or wherever.

JB: But your next posting anyway was an English speaking post?

JF: It was indeed, yes.

JB: Washington, 1967. You were First Secretary Commercial. Am I right in thinking that you were possibly one of the first fast stream people who did commercial work?

JF: It may have been fairly early. Certainly the message had gone round the Office structure at that time that in order to qualify for really senior posts you must be familiar with the commercial work of the Office. I can't quite recall the sequence, whether this was partly in response to the Duncan Report or whether the Duncan Report came later, but certainly for one reason or another commercial work was given great emphasis at this time. Some thought it was the only way the Foreign Office could justify having all these missions and all these people abroad; they had to satisfy British business that they were doing something useful; and also because commerce was such a vitally important part of relations that it was right that we give proper emphasis to it.

Anyway, I was one of quite a lot of people who said that they would be very happy to do commercial work. In fact the job I did was not strictly speaking a commercial job, it was a trade policy job, the distinction being that in a true commercial job you actually are getting to know businessmen, introducing British businessmen to them, getting to know a market, feeding back information about a market. In a trade policy job, you looked at relations with the US Government and Congress, on trade legislation, in the execution of the Kennedy Round of Trade Negotiations, on the thorny problems which blocked a particular aspect of British trade, such as their rules on pressure vessels or the attempt to exclude chocolate crumb for the making of chocolate. This sort of thing cropped up all the time in trade relations between two countries and particularly in the United States, where every congressman has got some influential lobbyist, who wants by some means or other to exclude foreign competition. The most outrageous I recall was when an influential congressman, who had some shipyard on a lake, which claimed to be able to make wooden submarines, managed somehow to exclude any other foreign submarine, or any part of it from ever being bought by the United States. It didn't last long but that was the sort of thing you were up against. The Mills Bill intended to restrict the import of all textiles into the United States, which put an ever present cloud on the horizon. We spent a great deal of time trying to lobby against the Mills Bill.

JB: Were you lobbying congressmen? Not officials? Congressmen?

JF: Well, both. Officials in the government, the State Department, the Commerce Department, the International Trade Office and so on. But also congressmen and their staffs, who dealt with these trade issues. So it was an interesting job because you were right inside US politics in a way that a normal diplomatic job dealing with disarmament or Afghanistan or something similar does not do, where you are dealing with the State Department largely. Although the way the US system works, it always has a congressional aspect. But the trade side of it is the most Congress oriented.

JB: But we were in an unhappy economic situation at home at the time.

JF: We were, yes, so it was vital to earn more dollars. I think our biggest effort was on the question of wine gallon assessment, which was an iniquitous system under which the water in whisky was taxed as if it was whisky. So the tax on bottled, imported whisky was much higher than it should have been.

Wine gallon assessment was finally wrapped up in a later round of international trade negotiations. We made some progress on it while we were there and generally on other trade issues. I think we did quite a bit of good. We averted some serious threats to various British trading interests. It was a satisfying job and of course Washington was a delightful place to live. After about three and a half years there I was coming up to 40 and the moment at which you start hoping for promotion to come and in due course the word came that I was indeed about to be promoted.

It came as a complete surprise to me that I was going to be posted to Warsaw. I never particularly thought about going to Poland and we got the post report and it said Poland is a featureless plain between two rivers. It sounded rather discouraging. But when we got there we found it was very interesting and very agreeable. Poland had been run by Gomulka from 1956, when he came in as a sort of a great white hero with anti-Russian credentials, until 1970, by which time his credentials had long since faded. The movement of strikes and protests in the shipyards led to the emergence of Gierak as First Party Secretary and all this was happening literally just as I was arriving in Poland. So it was a dramatic moment with great uncertainty; were the Russians going to intervene to put him down, were they going to accept Gierak, would he manage to revolutionise Poland?

In fact Poland did settle down under Gierak. He became to all appearances a good, strong, effective First Secretary of the Party. He reversed one of Gomulka's key policies, which was never to borrow

money. He believed in investment and thought that with foreign money, investment, trade and new industries, he could drag Poland up by the boot straps. One of my problems as Commercial Counsellor there was the flood of British bankers all wanting to lend money to Poland. The tentative doubts that we raised from time to time about how successful these industries would be, how the money was going to be repaid were always brushed aside. Although in later years we found that there was some uncertainty on both fronts.

JB: Yes, Poland did really over extend itself.

JF: The job that I was doing there, as Commercial Counsellor, was a more traditional commercial job. Getting to know the leaders of Polish industry and the ministries, so one could introduce British businessmen into the right places and get information for them and encourage them to develop opportunities to which they might not have had access. My job was a little complicated by the fact that I was number two in the Embassy, possibly the first time this had been done, that a commercial counsellor was number two in the Embassy. Other embassies found it terribly difficult to believe that a commercial counsellor was the number two.

JB: You mean other foreign embassies?

JF: Other foreign embassies, yes.

JB: Sir Nicholas Henderson was the Ambassador at that time.

JF: Yes, in fact he was unfortunately very ill for part of the time. For the first three months I was in charge of the embassy while he was incapacitated; happily he fully recovered later. But this added to the puzzlement of the diplomatic world of Warsaw that the Commercial Counsellor was not only the First Counsellor but was also the Chargé d'Affaires. It was one of those little shifts in diplomatic structure which seemed quite revolutionary at the time. It did mean that I also had to focus a great deal, of course, on the running of the Embassy and on the political relationship, as well as on my commercial work, which suited me very well. The political relationship, in a sense, was the one which was the more interesting and the more important.

JB: You spoke Russian. Poles don't really accept people speaking Russian?

JF: They don't like it at all, no, and if you opened up in Russian then you got a very frigid response. I did learn enough Polish to be able to conduct a normal conversation and even some business. I could read it.

JB: You did that while you were there?

JF: Yes. I found converting Russian into Polish was not that difficult. Two thirds of the words are basically the same and much of the grammar is the same. The endings tend to be different. What I found was that once you had established with your Polish interlocutor that you were trying to speak Polish and you were British, he never minded if you accidentally slipped into a bit of Russian. As long as you did it that way round and you were able to speak some Polish, you had full esteem for Poland and its language, and you were simply making mistakes, they didn't mind at all.

JB: It was a time when the Poles had just reached some kind of reconciliation with the Germans, was it not?

JF: They were moving tentatively in that direction, but it still had a very long way to go. Yes, the German Embassy was active, relations were just warming up and the Germans were just becoming serious competitors from our point of view in the Polish market. We had quite a privileged position at

the time. It was also my first experience of the impact of our accession to the European Community. At the time we were negotiating accession. I was in Poland from 1971-73 and fought very hard for our negotiators to take account of Polish interests and particularly their bacon exports, which were very important to them. Tens of thousands of little Polish pigs were shipped to the British market and as negotiations went on in Brussels, and our entry approached it became clearer and clearer that Polish agricultural produce was virtually excluded by the operation of the Common Agricultural Policy.

JB: And the Poles realised that?

JF: They did indeed and they fought very hard and pushed us very hard and we pushed London very hard. At the end of the day the rigours of the Common Agricultural Policy prevailed and there was no way that the Danes were going to have Polish pig meat competing with theirs.

JB: Which you later on had a great deal of experience with this?

JF: Yes, I went back from the years in Poland, which were enjoyable years, having had a great moment of hope in '71, that perhaps a whole new era was starting in Poland. But gradually the hope was beginning to fade, the industries were not doing as well as had been expected and relations with the Russians were clearly once again that of distinct subordination. Even if they wanted to they could not do anything about it. The scope for evolution was generally limited. In the course of my time in Poland I looked back on the years I had spent in the Diplomatic Service, which by now were almost twenty, and it seemed to me that far too much of it had been taken up with Communism, with Communist countries but essentially with antagonistic relationships.

JB: Do you mean from a personal point of view?

JF: No, from a political point of view. On the whole, excluding the United States, with Peking, Moscow and Warsaw, I'd been working as a diplomat in countries where one was, to some extent, working against the country or they were working against you, rather than co-operative relationships in which you were trying to achieve things. I wrote to the Foreign Office and said that after twenty years I would like to do something which would involve me in a more constructive relationship and above all, if possible, something to do with the merging shape of Western Europe and British membership of the European community. Such letters never got an answer and rarely got any sign that anybody had read them. But to my surprise and gratification when I went back I was made, just for short period, Head of Trade Relations Department, but when it became vacant three months later, Head of European Integration Department, internal.

This was six months after we joined the Community and a whole host of issues had to be sorted out. How we slotted into the community and adjusted British law and started to secure the changes we wanted as part of the continuing creation of Community law. I spent the next three years doing that and was then promoted to Under Secretary and spent another three and a half years overseeing the whole relationship with the European Community. I certainly got what I'd asked for. It was fascinating, it was intensive, it was very much a sixteen hour a day job, seven days a week. It involved frequent dashes to Brussels and back and involved a great deal of personal contact with ministers. One really was at the heart of the policy making function of the Foreign Office.

JB: Yes, I noticed that in that time you had the in the Office from '73 to '79, there were five Foreign Secretaries. It's a remarkable number in such a short time.

JF: When I came back Sir Alec Douglas Home, later Lord Home, was the Foreign Secretary. He took a fairly detached view of the European Community and didn't involve himself too much in all the murky detail, which is at the heart of the operation really. But he was highly respected by his

colleagues. I suspect that one word from him probably had as much influence with them as a thousand words from someone else. So he was, in a detached way, a very effective operator.

JB: Benevolent.

JF: Benevolent, well disposed and looking for solutions and expecting as reasonable men to sort something out with his German colleagues and so on. Then, of course, we had a change of government, in I think February '74, when Harold Wilson came in as Prime Minister and James Callaghan as Foreign Secretary, committed to the policy of renegotiating the terms of entry under which we had entered the European Community just a year earlier. This gave the Foreign Office one of the most difficult periods certainly I ever lived through, because after all there was a sacred and solemn treaty, signed, ratified at the end of a very long and arduous process of negotiation, which in a sense had gone on since 1962, before finally succeeding in 1971, and to come in appearing to intend to tear it up was extremely fraught. But we established very quickly a good understanding with James Callaghan about what he wanted to do. We worked out ways in which the objectives of renegotiation of Labour Party policy could be achieved without actually having to tear up the treaty and trying to go back to the beginning and to start again, which the other member countries would simply not have tolerated. On the one hand we were negotiating hard to secure certain changes which were most emphatically needed. Any British Government would have had to work for them, while satisfying the other member countries that this was all for the best in the long term, for them as well as for us. Jim Callaghan's job was to satisfy the Labour Party that this met their renegotiation requirements and to satisfy Harold Wilson, that it was a package which he should accept and commend to the Party and to Parliament. In the end we just about pulled it off.

JB: Was the Cabinet Secretary still the Prime Minister's man in the Foreign Office or were the Foreign Office Private Secretaries having more of a role?

JF: The Foreign Office Private Secretaries were much more significant by this stage. I'm trying to remember who.

JB: Bryan Cartledge was one.

JF: Bryan was certainly there for part of this time. I forget the sequence but there was a Deputy Cabinet Secretary called Sir Patrick Nairne, who was the Prime Minister's man on the European Community and with whom we worked extremely closely to try to achieve a saleable result, saleable to both the Community and to the Labour Party. Our view in the Foreign Office was that the area of real concern was the budget, which appeared and did work and would later work out gravely to our disadvantage in that we were paying far more in than we were going to get out. The reason it worked that way was largely because of the Common Agricultural Policy. The Policy itself was sacrosanct for many of the members. You could chip away a bit here and there but you couldn't really change it. You could only redress the situation by working on the budget and that was really at the heart of renegotiation. We did obtain commitments, which later on would prove to be very important with other member states, about how the budget could be adjusted.

Our life was complicated by the fact that other members of the Government had their own individual agendas. Harold Wilson had a particular fixation about New Zealand butter and when we got near a point that we thought we'd got something locked up and just about saleable, he would inject New Zealand butter, which raised all sorts of thorny problems because that too went to the heart of the Common Agricultural Policy. James Callaghan himself and Michael Foot and several others had a fixation about being able to subsidise the steel industry. There were six Secretaries of State for steel in that Cabinet. Saving a particular steel plant and making sure that it would not be subject to Community

restrictions, figured very largely and we had to try and negotiate terms under which in practice the British Government would be able to pour money, wasted money I hasten to say, into these dying steel plants.

There were also many other issues of this sort and the actual negotiations were much complicated by the fact that two or three of the leading areas, regional policy, industrial policy, trade policy, were in the hands of avowed anti-marketeters especially Peter Shore of the Department of Trade, Tony Wedgwood Benn, at the department that was responsible for regional policy. They frankly wanted to interfere in all the negotiations and were always delighted when they came back from Brussels to report that everything proposed had been rejected. At the official level, we had enormous help from Michael Palliser who was now the UK representative at the European Community, who had to try and weave a way around this to show that no, just sufficient, progress had been made or that negotiations were considered to be still on the rails.

JB: Sir Michael was known as a European?

JF: Yes, indeed. He was keen for negotiations to succeed and believed in the British role in the European Community. I suppose that was our basic position anyway, the British Government's position.

JB: But he got on well with the Foreign Secretaries, with Callaghan?

JF: Yes. He certainly had high regard for Michael's abilities, as a negotiator, as an analyst, as a persuader and as an administrator. There was no difficulty on that score. The whole team actually worked together very well and in the end produced a result that James Callaghan was able to recommend to Harold Wilson and the Cabinet. Wilson was able to say that he endorsed it and Wedgwood Benn didn't like it but said, "All right, if we have a referendum: it now must be put to the people". Which led up to the great referendum campaign of '75, which was the closest the Foreign Office and I ever got to domestic politics.

While it was clearly out of the question for the Office to send out material to voters or engage in polemics on the subject, we did nevertheless create a referendum office to which anybody could direct any questions, factual questions, on the subject of the European Community. We provided endless material to people who wanted speeches or articles. The flow of material, I must confess with hindsight, some years on, tended to point towards a positive vote in the referendum, which after all was the Government's own position, it was the Foreign Secretary's position, the Prime Minister's position and we did our best to support our own ministers and give them anything they wanted for this campaign. At the end of the day the result was favourable by two to one and, having had some not inconsiderable role in it, I took in a huge birthday cake with a map of Europe on it and we celebrated in the Department, and our ministers came along too to join in. The only bit of Britain which had actually voted against, which had voted no in the referendum, I think, was the Shetland Islands, possibly the Orkneys as well. So we carefully extracted that piece of the map from the cake and gave it to Roy Hattersley as penance. It seemed that we were going to settle down in the Community. The issue of membership was out of the way, so everybody believed at the time, and we simply had to go on to continue negotiations to secure improvements in the community, which is such an on-going process that on any given day of the week something is either going right or wrong in some area of community activity. It was definitely an intense job.

As time went on and the budget began to work out as we predicted, we had to try and cash in the chips that we had won in the renegotiation to secure a better deal on the budget and would have advanced this as a major issue for 1980. But in 1979 there came an election and a certain Margaret Thatcher became

Prime Minister. I recall going to Chequers at an early stage to spend a day briefing her with colleagues from the Treasury and the Cabinet Office on the European Community and we were all quite clear that the real issue we had to deal with was the budget and that something had to be done. What we didn't realise was that we were not moving into action an unwilling force, we were unleashing a tiger. The tiger duly landed at the Dublin Summit, I think in November '79, which was the first Summit I had been to with her, the first Summit of her premiership, at which the clash occurred and the fundamental confrontation with Giscard d'Estaing and Schmidt from which relations never really recovered. But the battle was launched and although very shortly after the Dublin summit (by now I had been six and a half years in London on the Community) I was posted, I think, although we couldn't control the way negotiations were handled and at times they did become very tumultuous, we had picked the right issue and we had got the Prime Minister launched to tackle it. It was finally resolved in 1984 by which time I was back on the scene again as Ambassador in Paris, at the Fontainebleau summit. I say resolved, as far as these things are ever resolved, but I think there was a satisfactory final solution to it. But that was five years later and for those five years the issue continued to torment the Community and create some difficulty for British relations with both France and Germany and other member countries. In the meantime I had been posted to Washington at the end of '79 and had two years as the Minister, the number two, at the Washington Embassy. Again working under Nico Henderson who had been my ambassador in Warsaw.

As Minister you dealt with the more significant high level political issues, many of them, at that time, were in the field of arms control, disarmament, and particularly Afghanistan. There was also Iran. It was a time when American hostages were being held at their compound in Tehran. There was a question of what the United States should do about it and what we could do to support them, so it was a crucial issue which was not finally resolved until the day that Reagan moved into the White House in January '81. It was very much at the centre of our attention for much of the time; Afghanistan was invaded in 1979 and there was an on-going debate on what we and the United States should do about it. It was a sensitive issue. There was also internal Washington politics, which is always fascinating.

JB: And a very close relationship. What about a special relationship?

JF: It is a term I have always avoided and never believed in. It is simply a close on-going relationship, facilitated by common language and to a significant degree by a common culture. You don't have to go back more than 150 years to get back to common roots. Facilitated also by the habit of working together and by a degree of intimacy based on trust and the sharing of information. I think much of that stems from the War, when we operated an alliance and conducted great joint operations of trust and confidence, which is rather different to other relationships; and with hiccups, it has persisted to our day. Even now there is a degree of exchange of thoughts and information, with no backward glances or reservations, which comes more instinctively across the Atlantic than it does in any other relationship. So you don't think about or talk about a special relationship, you just go down to the State Department and talk. Certainly in my time there I never found an issue that they were not prepared to talk about. Your problem was that if you raised some question they would flood you, they would bring in experts from all over town to do their best on it. It is a meaningful relationship.

JB: But you moved from there to be Ambassador in Paris in 1982. You must have been rather young to be Ambassador in Paris?

JF: Yes, the appointment came as a great surprise to me. I was disabled at the time. Curiously, in the 37 years I spent in the service I was only ever once out of action for more than say 48 hours. It happened in June '81 in Washington, when my eyes started to close up so to speak and I was rushed to hospital and found that I had both retinas detached. So after some anxious inquiries I went into hospital

in Baltimore and had a marvellous surgeon who stitched them back into place, but could not for some time predict what the outcome was going to be. This was precisely the moment, I learnt later, that I was being considered for Paris. It took three months for me to recover sufficiently to return to work. Very oddly on the day I did return to work, Michael Palliser was visiting Washington and came to see me and said "I am surprised that you haven't replied to my letter; is Mary having doubts?" So I said, "I haven't seen your letter as I've only come back to the office today". The foolish office had locked away a personal, confidential letter from the Permanent Under-Secretary, inviting me to take on the post of Ambassador in Paris.

JB: But you didn't have any doubts?

JF: I had no doubts at all and nor did Mary, so I was able to tell him on the spot that we were delighted to set out for Paris, whenever he wished. In fact just three months later we did leave Washington and after a couple of months briefing in London we set out for Paris.

JB: What about this theory that some people have that ambassadors, particularly in the European countries, have a lesser role now since the European Union and so much personal contact between the ministers?

JF: I think it has had a certain impact. It changed the nature of the job to some degree, because in certain situations ministers do now communicate directly, some more than others, although British ministers are not that keen on communicating directly with their opposite numbers.

JB: Is this possibly language?

JF: It is partly language and it is partly caution about communicating over the telephone. I think we've always been more security minded than most of our European colleagues. It's also the feeling that you don't have time to pause and reflect and take advice. You can be caught out on the telephone, much more easily than you can if you handle it after some thought and send instructions by telegram. The role of the Ambassador has become more that of co-ordinating in a given country all the different aspects of a relationship, including the European aspects. The problem of Europe, the Community or the Union, is that it is rather fragmented and you may have as many as ten different ministers going off and doing their own thing in Brussels or with an opposite number, somewhere. Now the Foreign Office, of course, and the Cabinet Office do a lot to co-ordinate what the different ministers are doing. But there is nobody who is in a position to say how that particular piece of British policy on pig meat, or that particular piece of British policy on the environment, is jointly going to impact, say on Italy; and yet that could be very important because there will be a single Italian view of what we are up to and a single French view and so on. I think an ambassador's role has become very largely trying to pull together these different strands. You may no longer conduct them to the same degree because the negotiation would have taken place in Brussels, at official level or at ministerial level in the council of Ministers, but somebody actually needs to know the collective impact of all of this on each given country and that's something, I think, only the ambassador can do. When the Foreign Secretary comes out to Paris he does expect to be briefed by the ambassador on how the French are viewing all of the things which are being done, and how this aspect of British policy has been received in France and what they are going to say to him about it and what he should say to them about it. He knows what the policy is. The question of handling the French or the Italians or the Germans can only really be judged on the spot.

JB: So somebody has to be keeping in touch with the bilateral relations?

JF: And a close eye on the community relationship at the same time. A traditional job, of course, is actually knowing who is who in the government, knowing who's up and who's down, who's going to be in and who's going to be out and when a particular effort is called for and what particular issues should the Prime Minister most advantageously take up with the president and so on. The ambassador, I think, now does rather less of that himself, more tends to be done by ministers, but it still has to be pulled together and the ministerial input has to be steered.

JB: Is that also the same kind of thing which you had to bear in mind when your final job was Political Director in the Foreign Office. That's also a co-ordinating role for Europe, as it were, in the Foreign Office. I am not really sure what a Political Director does.

JF: The title Political Director and the role of Political Director have a curious history. The French and, I think, certain other Foreign Ministries in Europe, divide their Foreign Ministry up in rather a different way. They have a secretary general at the top, then they have four directors under that: an economic director, a cultural director, the administrative director and the political director. The political director is not into politics, it means foreign policy. We have recently started calling the political director the foreign policy director, we should always have called him that, but we simply translated the French term into "political director" which led to a great deal of confusion in Britain, because everybody thinks it is something to do with politics. We didn't have anybody who occupies a role comparable to that of the French directeur politique, overseeing the whole of the foreign policy side of the apparatus. We had roughly speaking four deputy secretaries under the permanent secretary, responsible for different areas of policy. It was not obvious which one of them could become superior to the others, as the political director. The British structure is not made to work that way. So the simple solution was to take one of them and since one was talking about foreign policy, and the great issues of the time were on the whole the East-West relationship, they took the deputy under-secretary for the Soviet Union and Europe and gave him the additional title of political director. They let him go forth as the UK spokesman to the meetings of the committee of political directors, which meets roughly speaking once a month to, in theory, discuss foreign policy. This having caught on around the world, even the Japanese have created a political director, the Swedes created a political director and the Americans have created someone who is the equivalent to a political director, in order to have a point through which to slot in to this almost world-wide cabal of political directors.

When I came back to do the job it changed slightly because, since I had been Ambassador in Paris and was in grade 1, I acquired additional functions. One was to be deputy to the Permanent Under-Secretary and oversee the planning staff and things of that sort in the office, as well as being political director, but still maintaining the traditional functions of being Deputy Under-Secretary for East-West Relations and Europe. I found the combined three almost impossible.

JB: I was going to say that it sounded impossible.

JF: I found it jolly close to impossible because I was forever dashing off around the world as political director, just at the time some great crisis was occurring in Eastern Europe when, as Deputy Under-Secretary for the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, I desperately wanted to be at home to work on it. So we never really did resolve things very well. One was working under, in my view, unreasonable strain, quite absurdly long hours and far too much travel.

JB: Did you have a successor with the same responsibilities or has it been sorted out?

JF: Well, my successor had not been a senior ambassador, so he did not take over as deputy to the Permanent Under-Secretary with those additional responsibilities. He had to combine Deputy Under-Secretary and political director, which was already a very considerable handful. But I did manage to

get an additional under-secretary installed to whom he could pass a significant part of the burden and free himself to concentrate on the big issues. It was something I should have done early in my stint; at least my successor benefited from that.

JB: Do you think there is generally a problem of long hours in the Foreign Office?

JF: Very much so, yes. As far as I can gather the numbers are now being seriously cut and the strain grows ever bigger. One thing that has been done (I'm not really familiar with all the latest changes in the Office) but they are cutting out layers, so deputy under-secretaries no longer supervise assistant under-secretaries who supervise departments. They work in parallel. The deputy under-secretary has his departments and the assistant under-secretary has his, but there isn't one over the other, which is a simplification and possible improvement. You don't have time for an additional layer anyway, people are constantly away travelling as well so you can't wait for somebody to come back to go through that particular layer. So I hope that it's working efficiently. At the time I was doing it this was a considerable problem, particularly as we were trying to build up the role of the political committee and the degree of co-operation amongst the twelve, a move from simple consultation on policy and exchange of information into co-ordination of policy. Very difficult but I think we made some slight progress on that and this will continue over the years.

We were also, of course, starting to deal with the major evolution in the Soviet Union, with Gorbachev and the break up of Eastern Europe. I was at the Office long enough to see the Berlin wall come down; and having seen it go up, this was for me an excellent moment to leave. I really felt that my life as a diplomat had been successful. I had seen the fulfillment of a great objective, which marked a fundamental change in the climate. The one thing which had clouded those years, from the point of international relations, was the Cold War: it was the threat of possible armed conflict with the Soviet Union and the fact that any form of independence and liberty had been snuffed out of eastern Europe and we had been unable to do anything about it. The Soviet Union itself started to change dramatically and move towards, if not a democratic society, at least one that was not stifled by an ideology, which no longer had its roots so firmly in the grotesque Stalinist terror. All that was a happy conclusion if you like.

One knows that there are terrible uncertainties which lie ahead, that it will be more difficult dealing with these countries, such as Yugoslavia. The new problem of the Soviet Union itself, as it diminishes, as it partially breaks up, will pose a whole series of new threats. All these to my mind are infinitely less menacing than the threats under which we lived during the years in which I was actively involved. I think I enjoyed every single day that I spent as a diplomat, I enjoyed every single one of my postings and had the satisfaction of seeing the world in slightly better shape when I finished than when I began. At least I was in on the action for quite a number of key events.

JB: And you were Ambassador as well?

JF: Indeed, I lived in what was the most lovely Embassy we have in the world. The beautiful building that Wellington bought and which still has its original Premier Empire furniture, with its magnificent gardens, which I think, most diplomats around the world would regard as something of the ultimate dream place in which to install yourself.