

**BDOHP Biographical Details and Interview Index**

**FULLERTON, William Hugh (born 11 February 1939)**

**CMG 1989**

Career (with, on right, relevant pages in interview)

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BRITISH DIPLOMATIC ORAL HISTORY PROGRAMME

RECOLLECTIONS OF WILLIAM FULLERTON, CMG

recorded Wednesday 20 April 2016 by Caroline Colvin

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CC: Bill thank you for taking part in this project.

To start with you went to Cheltenham College and then Queens' College Cambridge, where I notice you read Oriental Languages, Arabic and Persian - Why did you choose that?

WF: Well this came about in a rather illogical way in that I'd had two years off because National Service had closed down, but Queens' College couldn't take me any sooner because of that, so I had two years to go away in. I went to Australia and the Far East and on the way back I went to the Suez Canal and so on; and while I was in Australia I was round about Alice Springs a lot, so I got a penchant for those kinds of scenes. And when I got to Cambridge I didn't know what to do because French and German, which were my A levels, seemed a bit dull by then and I'd had enough of them too, to be useful.

So I went to see the Dean of the College after two weeks of being there, and he was a splendid man called The Rev. Henry St John Hart, who was very distinguished with a dog collar and pipe, iron grey hair, and I said I've been here two weeks and I don't know what to do. And he said "Well what do you like?" So I said "Well I rather like sun and sand." And he said "Well, we do this course in Arabic and Persian, you know, you can try that." So I thought alright that's enough, so I'll do it.

CC: So you therefore read Oriental Languages at Cambridge, and then?

WF: Well then I went to Shell International Petroleum which seemed a good deal at the time and was, but they sent me to Uganda which was nothing to do with the Middle East really. So after two years - which was fine and I enjoyed that - I left them and went to the Foreign Office through Cambridge Appointments Board, and I was prepared to take the exam and all that sort of thing. And they said well we have this Department in the meantime you can go to, called the IRD in London, why don't you go there and we'll see what happens and maybe you could take a contract or something for a while, before you do any exam.

So I thought that seemed a good solution, and I went to do this and it was in Carlton House Terrace at the time, in rather a distinguished building badly carved up inside with partitions. I remember Kit Barclay was a sort of shadowy head of it, a member of Lloyds and various other distinguished things; and Anne Elwell, I think her husband was a Colonel in the MoD or something, it was all sort of slightly shady, but not very. I was sent to read Colonel Nasser's biography or his book, for no particular purpose but because they couldn't think what to do with me. Other people were scanning newspapers and trying to cook up articles to go in foreign newspapers, and place articles and all that sort of thing, propaganda exercise, really, not particularly black.

### **1965, MECAS, Lebanon**

Anyway after doing that for a week or two I went to see Kit Barclay and he said, "Look, as you're an Arabist and we need Arabists, we'd like to send you to MECAS in Beirut in Shemlan, for the advanced course as you already have a degree in Arabic. And so I said "Well that's fine, I'd like to do that, but what's the quid pro quo?" And he said "We need you to guarantee us a year after that and probably you'd go to Jeddah as Information Officer, where they're opening a new post with that title." So I thought well, six months in Beirut followed by a year in Jeddah can't be bad, and so I said Yes please, and off I went to do that.

In those days it was rather pleasant. One took a first class sleeper, although I actually had a car so I drove across Europe to Genoa, then we got on a boat, a rather nice first class cabin, and went through Alexandria and various places and fetched up in Beirut, where you unloaded yourself and were escorted up the hill to Shemlan. Which was a very interesting place, a good school staffed considerably by Palestinians of course, and other exiles from the Arab world, teaching good modern radio and newspaper kind of Arabic.

People like David Gore-Booth were there and Stewart Crawford who later became Political Resident in the Gulf. We sat up there high above, and anyone would recall this from MECAS, high above looking down on a mini town, and you could see planes coming into the airport below you. We worked quite hard, at least some of us did. I found it difficult because my Arabic was purely classical - at Cambridge nobody was in the least bit interested in speaking Arabic or Persian, they wanted you to do literature and religion and history and

all that, and so I found it hard going. I never ever tried to say anything in Arabic like 'open the window', but I could read a commentary on the Koran quite capably in classical Arabic. However, somehow I managed to scrape through that and passed it, which was just as well because you got money for doing it, you got a language allowance.

There were very useful escapades, language breaks, where you could go away for some days with the theory that you would speak Arabic in parts of the Arab world round about, and get good practice going. Some of us took this rather seriously and some of us rather enjoyably. I had a Land Rover so I would go off, perhaps with a friend or two, and we went down to Wadi Rum, which was well known of course in those days as a Police post, and stayed a night or so there chatting to the Beduin Police, who were great fun. Another time I drove with a chap called Hugh Carol from the Ottoman Bank, across the Syrian desert. In those days Britain/Syrian relations were not quite certain, Syria was constantly having coups and changes in government, so we didn't ask permission. We set off and I remember the first stop we found was a Beduin tent outside in the desert near Palmyra somewhere very poor with hardly any shade, and a simple man in his tent waved us in for a meal which was extremely hard gristle out of an enamel bowl. The radio on the floor was broadcasting vicious anti-British propaganda in Arabic from Cairo, but this was ignored by everybody. Behind the curtain came titters and giggles from the female side of the family, which we never saw of course.

And then we set off across the pipeline, across the desert. We didn't know where we were going to stay that night. We had a sleeping bag in the back but we knew there was a pumping station, a Syrian pumping station along the oil pipeline, quite a large structure with plenty of technical works going on. And we thought we'd try our luck so we went there and went into the gate, a rather a worried looking guard let us go in; and we were taken to a large conference room where a whole lot of Arab officials were having a conference round a table. And this stopped the proceedings rather. Then we stood there, and they were rather suspicious at first of course, but then we started our MECAS Arabic on them and explained what we were doing, and being hospitable, and the Syrians are really rather nice people apart from their government. And very soon they said come along, you'll have dinner here, you'll stay the night, you'll have breakfast, we'll refuel the car, and then you can go on in the morning. So we did all that and it was a very nice experience I thought.

However when we got to the Iraqi side and found another pumping station in Iraq, we tried the same trick and they weren't interested at all. A big difference between the Syrians and Iraqis I thought at that time. So that was an interesting experience. And when we got there, ironically and funnily enough nowadays, we stayed the first night in the YMCA in Baghdad – it seems improbable given the present situation! And then we had a contact there and so we were looked after, and we drove back. I do remember of course there were tanks around the Palace, in Baghdad it was a normal phenomenon, it was quite standard in those days.

### **Information Officer, Jeddah, 1965-66**

Finally we finished at MECAS and Christopher Long, who was a Third Secretary from Jeddah, and with whom I was going to share a house down there, came up to me as he'd done the MECAS not long before, and we drove down in a Land Rover to Jeddah. In those days there was virtually no bitumen, and once there was about a 50 mile gap of sand between Jordan and Saudi Arabia. I remember there was a little doctor post on the frontier with an Egyptian doctor in a beige raincoat who insisted on giving Christopher a smallpox jab, which I thought was rather risky at that point; fortunately I'd had one so I was alright! So then we went across and we slept the night in a petrol station somewhere on some charpoys, listening to the chimes of Big Ben from the World Service coming out over the night air. But then there was bitumen down to Jeddah so it was an easy ride from there.

I was supposed to be opening an Information Officer job down there, at that point there hadn't been one, and this was a doddle really as nobody knew what it meant or how to do it. I had to sort of look at the newspapers now and then, and I used to take articles to try to put in the newspapers. People would phone me, and it was very agreeable, and there was a lot of opportunity for travelling about and calling on people.

I do remember going once – I had a very nice Sudanese assistant called Abdul Munim Hashim, who was a very genial fellow, and he used to go round with me, and help me with the Arabic when I got stuck. I do remember we both called on the Somali Embassy on one occasion - we used to go round calling on Embassies – and they were all very surprised but very polite, and had a Coca-Cola or something. And when I got back to the Embassy they said you shouldn't have called on them, we broke off relations with them, we don't have any relations with them! (Laughter) I remember being very surprised when a sheet of telegrams

came round and I didn't know what to do with it, I'd had no Foreign Office training. So I read them and tore them up - I said I've read those, and they said No you can't tear them up! It was all very relaxed.

Morgan Mann was the Ambassador, he was a very good Arabist and used to converse in Arabic with the King with no interpreter. There was an elderly Counsellor called Bill Cranston who had been in the Indian Civil Service I think, and who had been found a niche in the Foreign Office, and was a very unwell man but very much of the old school, and a bachelor and very serious and absolutely straight as a die. He was really quite the opposite of Morgan Mann who was sort of volatile and on about his second or third wife, I can't remember which.

But it was pleasant, the Embassy was in an old building down in Jeddah – Jeddah was really a village compared with now, nothing like the massive supermarkets or flyovers and things like that. We had for example, one of my jobs was to provide films shows for the Embassy and for other people, and we did this on the tennis court and we got them from the Army Kinema Corporation I think it was, and the Ambassador used to invite various Saudi *prominenti* whom he knew. There was no cinema in Jeddah so this was it, down on the tennis court out in the open air, I was doing the projection.

We did have a visit once from a pianist called Dennis Matthews if I recall, who was flying through for a week of engagements somewhere and had to stop in Jeddah. He said he'd like to earn some money, could he give a recital? Well this was an unheard of event in Jeddah in those days, but I was put in charge of it. We borrowed the American Ambassador's piano - I remember Morgan Mann's wife saying he'll never lend you the piano and don't be stupid - but he did, and the American I.S. chap, a guy called George Thompson, was very helpful and we put the Ambassador's piano on a lorry and we drove it through the middle of Jeddah and the sand and everything. The only place to have it was an auditorium belonging to the airline out at the airport and it was open air, so we knew there was going to be the risk of aeroplanes in the middle of the concert. But we made a grand show of it, I know we had dinner jackets, I gave a little speech and the Diplomatic Corps was all there, and one or other dignitaries. And sure enough, he played and when a DC3 thundered in with roaring engines, he stopped for ten minutes until it had got off, and then he started on again! And life was like that in Jeddah.

There was a very rudimentary television service, which frequently broke down. There was an English programme on the radio for an hour or two hours a week I think it was, and you would often sit and listen to this and you would hear to your surprise that you had requested a certain piece of music - of course nobody had, but they played it and no one was taken in. There was a story, maybe apocryphal, that when this programme, I think on the day of the death of Winston Churchill, probably at about that time, this was given prominence in the news as opposed to the usual items they were fed, like King Faisal's travel from Jeddah to Riyadh, or when Prince so-and-so travelled somewhere; and they were put in prison for two days for altering the news without permission. It was a fun place, I enjoyed Jeddah a lot in those days.

CC: You mention here "Amir Fahd, later King, at cocktail party"?

WF: Oh yes, I remember that. We were doing some dealing in arms in those days, which sounds awful but there was a problem with Yemen, the Egyptians were invading it, and the Royalists were countering and fighting this off, and we and the Saudis were worried, so we supplied them with some Hawker Hunter jets I think, and some missiles and later some Lightnings, which were a very sophisticated aircraft. And at a party given by the Air Attaché I saw standing by himself for a minute, this figure of Amir Fahd who I think was Minister of the Interior at the time and later became King – and I thought I'd better go and talk to him, being a good diplomat, and so I went and contrived something to say, I thought what do I say to this man?

He was reputed to go to Claridge's for health reasons for three months in the summer, there were a lot of stories like that. Anyway I went to him and said "Would you be able to understand any Arabic spoken anywhere in the Arab world?" And he said of course he would – which is not true actually, for when two Moroccans start talking Arabic, no other Arab can understand a word of it if they're talking colloquial rather than Moroccan Arabic. Anyway, he said of course he could, and then I was rescued by somebody else who came along to help with the conversation. Then I saw him doing this quickstep with a rather pretty Palestinian girl. So I thought that was my first occasion of mingling with the great and the good in Saudi Arabia.

CC: Along the same lines as that really, you mention here King Faisal's private joke to me afterwards?

WF: Yes, King Faisal was very impressive; he was quiet, dignified, wise, and very shrewd. And we had a Parliamentary visit, a British Parliamentary delegation came out and I remember Christopher Mayhew was in it who had been or was a Minister, and Gladwyn Jebb who was later our Man at the UN, and a rather left-wing MP playwright, whose name I've forgotten now but he was quite well known at the time, and somebody else. They came and they'd been to Egypt and were rather impressed by Nasser, which rather annoyed King Faisal who was not impressed of course, and they kept on saying throughout the meeting "Of course we're not a party delegation, this is a Parliamentary delegation, we're not talking on behalf of the government so we can say what we like, and it's all very wonderful." And the King just nodded and sat there looking wise and didn't actually say anything much. But at the end of it they all lined up and they tried to ingratiate themselves a bit by saying "You will remember Your Majesty, that you and I met at the UN at such and such a time", and he just nodded. And during this time they had stressed, as I said, they weren't anything to do with government. King Faisal put his hand on my shoulder and he said "I suppose you're the British Government". They all laughed, and there were some very famous people there, Hafez Wahba, Rashad Pharaoun, some well-known names at that time, and they all gave a nice little smile and saw me on my way. So that was very nice.

CC: So that takes us to the end of your posting in Jeddah, but there is one more little note here, you say about the Egyptian incursion into Yemen, there were many people of mainly aristocratic bent who passed through.

WF: Yes, Billy Maclean, David Smiley, they were big names at the time, a lot of them had been in the Army and been in the war and they were all rather well-to-do. They used to sneak through and help the Royalists in their caves down there against the Egyptians, by running the wireless and that sort of thing. And they'd come furtively back up again through Jeddah again. We all knew it was happening although whether it was official at that point only they knew. Wilfred Thesiger came to lunch in those days. I met him several times later but it was an interesting experience to see these kinds of people doing that. I don't know whether those kind of people exist nowadays, they were all a bit aristocratic.

CC: Yes, probably a wider group nowadays.

WF: Yes, yes. The great joy that place, Saudi Arabia, as a young Arabist I went with two colleagues from the Embassy, in a Land Rover, first to Taif, then all the way down to the Yemeni border and there were no hotels and we camped out all the way - we had some gin and tonic in the back - and we called on Emirs in mud forts in remote places, and we went to local shaikhs' majlises and there were Bedu wandering in and out and saying what they felt about the situation or they'd lost their sheep or whatever it was. Then back up almost entirely along the Red Sea beaches, to get back to Jeddah again. The whole thing was ten days and we were paid to do this, you know, it was wonderful for a young Arabist! I don't suppose there's time for that anymore, now it's all terrorism and security and God knows what all, one couldn't do it. One could drive all the way to Dammam which was a bitumen road and that was rather dull. But I remember another occasion going with the military attaché who was splendid colonel – well there are two nice stories, but stop me if it's getting too long – We went up to Hail in the north, which was a well-known city which had harboured the Rashids who'd been against the Saudi regime in the early days. And the Colonel and I and his wife and the Sudanese driver went up to pay a visit there. I do remember the first night we all camped in the sand somewhere and the Sudanese driver, a very nice chap; we had a picnic, we had some food and I said to the colonel, what about the driver? "I've got some food for him." So I noticed there was a tin of pork luncheon meat, and I said "Colin you can't give him that – it's pork luncheon meat!" "Oh he'll never know!" Not really an attractive story in retrospect.

CC: Did he eat it?

WF: Yes, he didn't know what it was - he thought it was lovely!

Then we got to Hail where there was this great palace, vast miles of corridors and passages, and we were taken in there, and there was a very famous amir (Bin Jaluwi) who was lurking with all his people around and the Koran was being read to him; and he was sort of lolling on a divan and we were introduced and accepted, people with guns all around - you know, a feudal situation. And we were greeted and allowed to sit there and listen to all this going on, it was like in the Middle Ages or something.

One last and rather more amusing experience than that, was we had a frigate of the Royal Navy, HMS Leander coming to Yenbo. Yenbo was a Lawrence of Arabia kind of port, which features in Lawrence but now it's a huge oil town; but in those days it had two sort of concrete jetties, sufficient to hold two very tired-looking Greek freighters, heavily overloaded. But surprisingly it had a German tug which they must have bought off the shelf somewhere, with a German captain who must have been an escaped U-boat commander or something.

So Colin Fitzpatrick and I went up, and we slept out again and crossed over the Lawrence Hejaz railway and it still had bits of trains and things on it, rusting in the sand. We got there and a German captain at the time was pathetically glad to see two Europeans, and even more pathetically glad when we produced a bottle of whisky. So we went on the boat the next morning and Colonel Colin said "Can I use your wireless to talk to the ship?" So he said "Jawohl of course you can!" So Colin gets on the radio: "HMS Leander are you receiving me?" All this stuff. We get a crisp message "Wait one!" from the ship. So Colin said "He wants us to wait a minute." And three times that happened. Then I looked out of the porthole of the bridge and there was HMS Leander steaming in! Now this side of the creek was white frothy water and that side was nice dark green-blue water, and HMS Leander went straight into the grey patch, and stuck. So we had a pilot in a rowing boat, who was an Arab with a turban, and we rowed out to HMS Leander and got on, there was pandemonium and so forth - "Boat full stern ahead, stand this side, pull this way and stand the other .." and in the end the German tug came out and pulled them off! The Saudi guard of honour was wilting on the dockside by this time, in the sun.

That was fine, we got down below and we were in the ward room with the captain, he was a very nice man I think called Roy Eveleigh of the Fleet Air Arm. Now a lot of Navy people said that explains everything, that there should have been a Fleet Air Arm chap driving the ship, but anyway – and I remember him puffing on his pipe after one of our pink gins, and he said "You know, ten years ago I'd have been bloody scared about this, but now I don't give a damn!

CC: Just as well! (laughter) You then did a drive back to London from Jeddah to take the civil service tests?

WF: Yes I did. A friend of mine came out from London, a Cambridge friend, and we drove back up, which was an uneventful journey, except that we stayed the night in Tebuk where the local deputy Emir put up us, and said to us after we'd arrived "I've got a present for you". And we all thought how wonderful - gold watches, this sort of thing. He produced a baby gazelle, which promptly weed on the carpet, but nobody bothered about that. So we stayed the night there and in the morning we thought, what are we going to do with this gazelle, you see? Because we'd been given it and he'd be insulted, so we thought about it and in the end I said "Look, we love this but it won't survive our journey in the Land Rover and the British authorities are very tiresome about gazelles coming from abroad." So what were we going to do about it? I said "would you be very kind and look after it for us? And in honour of our former great Queen, would you call it Victoria?" So this rang a bell, royalty and the Queen and all that, and so he did, he accepted it, he probably ate it next day! So we left Victoria behind. (Laughter)

CC: You made some comments about the test itself –

WF: Yes, that was rather fun, I mean it was fun and it wasn't in the sense that one's career was hanging on it, but then the British Council kindly offered me a job so that was in the background.

CC: Were you tempted by that?

WF: Not above the Foreign Office possibility, but it was nice to have it in the background because they live a similar sort of life; you live abroad, and all that stuff. So anyway, we had these two days of tests and as you know they had psychiatrists, and they had a member of the Service and First Secretary or Counsellor level, and then they had an old buffer who was a former Governor of a Colony or whatever; I was impressed by him. We had intelligence tests - now they are something before my time really, intelligence tests; I think there was a man who produced them, some professor [? Eisenck]. Anyway I had practised down in Shropshire staying with my mother and did things to try and understand them. Sir.., whoever it was I can't remember now, said I wasn't doing very well in the intelligence tests, so I thought maybe this was bad sign. But I said no I wasn't used to those kinds of thing, it wasn't my scene, and then he said "Would I have been at Cambridge with your father?" And I said "Well yes you would, probably." I thought that's good, though it's not supposed to

happen nowadays. So that was alright and I quite enjoyed the tests. And then the final board which I was summoned to attend, and that was good sign, there were about 10 of them sitting there.

I remember a question, now which seems silly, but one of these fellows said "Tell me Mr Fullerton would you accept it if a black man were to be in the Service?" There was only one possible answer wasn't there, if I'd said no on no account, it would have been a black mark even in those days; but actually I was happy to say and believe "Yes I would, if he's qualified of course we could have a black man." Now years later you wouldn't ask that kind of question, one wouldn't need to. And then finally the chairman of the Board, who was a jovial fellow looked up and said "Where did you go to school Mr Fullerton?" And when I said Cheltenham College "So did I!" he said, and I thought this is getting better and better. Laughter.

CC: So anyway, you passed into the Foreign Office.

WF: I managed to get in and I got a letter, a very unhelpful letter, saying you know - if and but and maybe, and if you pass the health test and there's nothing against you, and this that and the other, maybe you'll begin the job in three months' time. All very unjolly, but anyway, it was done. There was no training of course, you were walked round the Office by some Under-Secretary who said this is this department, and that's that, there was no diplomatic training like the Germans and other people had. If you ought to know about it, if you need it, you learn on the job. No training. (Laughter)

### **UK Mission to UN, New York, 1966-67**

CC: Exactly, not the way training is taken so seriously now. Anyway, then you went - you called yourself a dogsbody - to the Third Committee at the UK Mission to the UN.

WF: That's it. With Lady Gaitskell, widow of the previous politician. I was a general dogsbody, running and fetching and carrying, it was deadly boring; everybody did their stock speeches and you knew what was coming all the time, you were supposed to make some notes, and it was pretty dull.

CC: But the highlight of that was you met your wife.

WF: I did, when I went to Boston. At Cambridge during the last year in my degree, there were three of us doing Part II Arabic and Persian. There was an American of Persian origin who'd already got a first class degree at Harvard; there was another chap who already had a first in Classics from Scotland, and there was me, so it was jolly tough I thought. Anyway, the Persian American who later was named a genius by the McArthur Foundation – you've heard of that in America? It's a Foundation that names certain people as geniuses and it gives them \$100,000 and says you can do what you like with it. Well he later got that.

Anyway I went up to see him in Boston where he was at Harvard and my wife had gone to visit a friend of hers who was pregnant, and we happened to be on the same plane coming back. I saw her going along and thought that's a rather pretty girl, I wouldn't mind sitting next to her; but the blessed plane was practically empty so it took a lot of courage! So I did that anyway, and we got talking, I desperately made conversation, it was only a short flight, I didn't know what to say! And I said what are you reading or something banal, or how long does it take to get there, or something. And we got on from that somehow. She was a curator at the Brooklyn Museum. And I said why don't you come to supper one evening and you show me the Museum? So from then on it sort of was OK.

CC: So you were pretty struck right from the beginning?

WF: Yes I think so and it somehow worked you see, so there we are!

I was still at the UN and there were some good things about it; there was a Hospitality Committee where fairly well-to-do American ladies and others invited the young people to stay, and I did one of those and so on.

CC: Just to nip back to your wife briefly, did she have any idea what a Foreign Office life was going to be like?

WF: Not really, no. She was a curator of painting and sculpture at the Brooklyn Museum, and an art historian with a post graduate degree and all the rest of it, and earning about three times what I was earning at the time.

CC: So it was quite a jump for her?

WF: It did, it took about a year or so. I mean I went back and - that was rather amusing and it may have turned the tide a bit - my time came to an end and I went back just before Christmas, and when I got to the Arabian Department they said "Oh we didn't know you were coming back yet, we don't need you for a while." So I got on a plane and went back to New York the next day, and that may have turned the scales, she may have thought I was serious. I was only able to spend about four or five days there, but I did, and then you know I went over in the spring for three or four weeks and she came here for the summer, and then it sort of worked.

CC: And then did she enjoy the life after that?

WF: I think so because she did a lot of things in it. That will come out perhaps later on, but she produced a book in Kuwait and she wrote articles in Somalia and she got an MBE in the end for doing various things. She ended up, I should say, as an LE3 in the Embassy in Rabat. There was an attempt to make a way of paying Foreign Office wives.

CC: Yes I remember it well.

WF: Well, she became an LE3 and that was the height of her FCO career! (Laughter)

### **Arabian Department, FCO, 1968-70**

CC: So after your sojourn in New York, you came back to Saudi Arabian Department which would make rather more sense.

WF: That made quite good sense, yes. I looked after Saudi Arabia and then Yemen.

CC: We are now 1968?

WF: Yes. The fun things about that really were interpreting for Sheik Zaid of Abu Dhabi and Sheik Rashid of Dubai at Buckingham Palace lunches, which was quite glamorous and

fun to do. And it wasn't very difficult because none in the party had a word of the other's language, so they didn't know whether you were talking nonsense or not.

CC: You know how to make good conversation, and probably held the whole thing up! And you met Wilfred Thesiger again?

WF: I met him at a party at Lancaster House, and I remember him saying to me that he found writing hard, he'd obviously written great books by then, but he said "I don't mind being killed by a naked savage with a spear, but I'm damned if I'm going to be killed by some revolutionary in ill-fitting khaki with a machine gun!"

CC: What a very interesting thought, yes. And then a period as a reserve Resident Clerk, so presumably at that point you weren't married?

WF: No, I wasn't married at that point. That was quite fun, you had a lot of power because it was a sort of rule that if you disturbed someone in the middle of the night, some senior chap, and he thought the reason was inadequate, he couldn't tick you off because you had the responsibility and if you got it wrong now and then, never mind, but you couldn't risk the other way, if there was some dramatic thing which you had to report.

CC: That's quite empowering actually.

WF: It was empowering, yes, and it was a super place to be, in a lovely little flat in the top, looking down on St. James's Park, yes I enjoyed it very much. The one thing that I do remember coming in the night there was Horace Philips, who I mentioned was Jewish, Scottish Jewish, and he was put up as Ambassador to Saudi Arabia. And it was George Brown at the time who was Foreign Secretary, bit wild at the time. Anyway, he was put up slightly teasingly I think probably because he was Jewish and the Saudis didn't allow Jews really. But Philips had been there earlier as a young man, and spoke Arabic and was liked there, but the Jewish Chronicle for whatever reasons known to them, decided to stir the pot. They published it and thought they'd stir some trouble between the Arabs and the Jews. So they published this and then the Saudis said now that it's all in the open, it would have been alright, but we can't now do it.

That message came through to me in the night and so I rang up some senior chap at a dinner party to tell him this fact, and that call was justified.

Horace Philips was later my Ambassador in Turkey so it didn't stop his career, but he would have been perfectly good for that job. But the Saudis behaved well, the Saudi Ambassador took him out to dinner in London and said we're so sorry about this but you know now it's been made public and such a fuss has been made it would be difficult. It was a pity they didn't have a bit more gumption and say to hell with it we'll take you because we're an independent nation. But they didn't. And in those days, of course, there was much more anti-Israeli feeling among Arabs than there has later been – it's still not lacking but there was more then, it was more black and white perhaps.

### **Head of Chancery, Jamaica, 1970-73**

CC: And then you went to Jamaica as Head of Chancery? A different sort of move altogether.

WF: That was a funny thing. My wife actually was Jewish, had never been to Israel, had nothing to do with Israel, was not a religious Jew, but she was Jewish. And there was a fear in some part of the Office – they said, well you can go to the Arab world in many places, but there are obviously some parts where you wouldn't go. And Oman I was put up for, and that would have been perfectly safe, we travelled there later without any trouble and indeed anything; but I think it was Peter Hayman who was DUS at the time said "We can't have that, it's too risky" and Head of Arabian Department said it's fine.

So they were looking for somewhere else and Jamaica popped up and ironically my wife had been on a Committee in the DSWA with Nancy Larmour who was a Big Wheel in it and very keen on education, and they got friendly. And Nancy and Nick were going as High Commissioner to Jamaica and they were looking for a First Secretary, and Nancy said "Oh I know a chap and I know his wife, and he'll be all right."

So because of that, and well to me it was OK although I didn't really want to go there because it didn't sound very interesting, I wanted to be in the Middle East or something, Turkey or anywhere. But it was OK and we went there and they were a nice couple, very

liberal, an intellectual sort of pair. But a High Commission in a country particularly where the Queen is Head of State is not quite the same as an Embassy. But we had a lovely house and acres of ground, an old Colonial house, we had a dog and my daughter was born there and there were nice people around, the work wasn't that exciting, there were bananas and things, you know trade deals and the EU at that time was coming up – Geoffrey Rippon came out to sort of talk EU and bananas with the Jamaicans. We had sailing and so it was not a bad existence, but all a little bit irrelevant.

The one thing that was interesting to me though – Nick Larmour, who was a very nice man, very intelligent, being liberal he said “Now I want people to call me Nick.” I said “Really? You can't do that sort of thing really.” “No really, I want to have a nice relaxed place and we're all on first names.” So I thought that's not going to work but never mind, and went on calling him Sir.

But there was an occasion when there was an outing, a High Commission outing up-country, and we all came back in a train; and he and Nancy got in late and all the seats were taken. And nobody stood up, well we were standing but nobody else stood up until the elderly Defence Attaché, immediately when he saw this he stood up – they were older than the High Commissioner, but anyway he and his wife stood up. And I was summoned by the High Commissioner afterwards and he said “This is really disgraceful you know, I and my wife, you know.” And I said “Well, it's all a part of calling you Nick!”

CC: You can't have it both ways! (laughter)

WF: No, no you can't. He was a very nice person, pleasant and intelligent too, but you know, liberal and trendy was a bit too much. (laughter) Up to a point, yeah, exactly.

CC: Again things have changed very much.

WF: Yes they have.

### **Head of Chancery, Ankara, 1973-77**

CC: And so then you moved on to Ankara in 1973, again as Head of Chancery.

WF: Yes Ankara was up my street I thought, I knew it wasn't Arab but that didn't matter, Turkey was every bit as interesting and as good as most Arab places. Horace Philips I mentioned was there, we had CENTO and NATO and all that, Cheltenham was up there on the North coast, the comings and goings, and it was all very interesting that way. I needed Turkish up to intermediate level, so I did that.

It was a fun country, I mean tourism hadn't really been invented in those days, now it's overwhelmed with tourists, but in those days one could travel all over the place; we had a big Range Rover - £1820 it cost in those days - and we travelled all over. We stayed in lovely hotels, and we picnicked around Ankara, and Anatolia in little villages and people put melons in our car and all this sort of thing, it was very basic. And we did a wonderful train journey to Tehran where we saw Anthony Parsons – this was just before it all went wrong of course. So there were a lot of very interesting things to do and the relations with the Turks were OK. There was the Cyprus business where they invaded Northern Cyprus and things got a bit tense between us and them for a while, the Turks and us.

CC: You say 'The glorious Consulate General in Istanbul'. It is quite something isn't it.

WF: Oh fantastic building, yes, I hope we're not going to sell that. Oh I tell you there was a story, again it may be apocryphal – there was a story that the Treasury wanted to sell this; and we heard of this and the Ambassador Horace Philips heard of it, and he went to see the President of the Turkish Senate, who was a very distinguished old chap, old school, and he said "You won't believe this, Senator, but there are some people in England who want to *sell* the Consulate-General!" And the Turk drew himself up and said "It would be a disgrace to your nation. Because you were given that by Sultan Murad, or whoever it was, 200 years ago and how could you possibly sell it!" The Ambassador sent a telegram to London "I happened to meet the President of the Turkish Senate who said he'd heard a story that .."  
(laughter)

CC: Well that was that, then!

WF: That was that, finished - End of story! So we kept it, a wonderful building.

There were lovely journeys on the night express from Ankara to Istanbul, you know, everybody quaffing raki as hard as they could go. And we drove through Syria to Kurdish villages with Jeremy Varcoe who was Information Officer at the time, and we went off in the Land Rover, with cans of film, you know propaganda stuff, and we would stop in Eastern Turkish villages, like Bitlis. They were very basic places, and we would call on the Governor and say 'Do you mind if we give a film show in the town square, in the open air?'

And the Governor would say he didn't mind, and Jeremy was in charge of that, and there would be a sea of cloth-caps, Turks straight off the countryside, and our screen probably rippling in the wind a bit, and films of Britain, quite incomprehensible. There was wonderful film of tractors being tested, and part of testing a tractor was to run it over a cliff and make it turn over and see if was alright at the end. You could see all these Turks thinking we'd give our eyeteeth for a tractor and here are these people throwing them over, what's it all about?! It wasn't in Turkish, but of course in English. And when they saw the Trooping the Colour, they probably thought - a woman, on a horse? Whatever next?! (laughter) But what they did like was sort of Arsenal versus Tottenham or something, there they were safe! But there'd be a silence, from these cloth-cap and there'd be 'Tse-tse-tse' and we never knew if this meant we were about to be hounded out of the town, or whether it was meant to be good! But we were told if they didn't mind it they carried on Tse-tse-tse.

The simplicity of our lives and the fun things, we had to do these things. We did, Jeremy and I, we drove right up to Hakkari and these various Kurdish villages where you can't get to now, not at all, it was very colourful. Very colourful.

### **Southern European Department, FCO, 1977-80**

CC: And then after that you were back, well again a slight detour in a way, to London where you were Assistant in the Southern European Department.

WF: Yes, Portugal, Spain and Gibraltar. A lot of people in the Office would have been thrilled to do it, but it didn't really interest me, I wanted to be over there. The thing was the other half of the Department was doing Turkey, and Cyprus and Greece. Anyway, I was made an Assistant, so that was a slight consolation. The thing I do remember there, Arlene

and I we did a lovely train trip to Spain, and we had to visit the Posts of course, so we went by train to Spain and Portugal and had a good time doing that.

A fun trip I might mention here, to Gibraltar – I don't know whether you remember Frank Judd, I think he's now Lord Judd; I remember he was an earnest, trendy liberal intellectual. I don't think he got on with Owen at all, but he couldn't say so, but he was much nicer than Owen, he was OK. But we went out to Gibraltar he and I, with his secretary, not typing kind of secretary but Secretary in Office terms, who was a girl, a very bright girl. And we went out, and when we got there the Governor of Gibraltar a Marshal of the RAF, Sir John Grandy no less, distinguished World War pilot and God knows what, had arranged a black-tie dinner for the Government and it was all male.

And Judd, the trendy, leftie intellectual said we can't have that, my secretary she's a girl, she has to come. And the Governor he said "No way, you can't have that, it's all male." So from the word go - but a Minister was a Minister, so in the end the Air Marshal had to give way. So she came to the dinner, this single woman, with all these black tie men, and she held her own no doubt.

But the funny thing was that later in the evening Marshal of the RAF Sir John Grandy summoned me for a drink, just the two of us, and he said "I can't believe that a funny, silly little man like that can really be a Minister of Government, I mean it's ridiculous!" Blow me the next night, Judd asked us for a drink and he said "I can't believe that a silly, fuddy-duddy old person like that can ever have flown a plane, been appointed Governor?" So I said "Very distinguished airman, you know, very grand career", and earlier of Judd "Very bright politician, you know, on the up .."

CC: The two would never meet!

WF: No, never. I didn't like that, the whole atmosphere in the Office was really not good at that time. I remember Anthony Duff running down the corridor once, counting. And I said, "Sir Anthony, why are you counting?" He said "Days until I retire!" (laughter)

CC: Poor man, what a sad thing.

WF: Well he became Chairman of JIC.

I remember attending a meeting when Ewen Fergusson was there and the PUS was there, and at the end the PUS went up to Owen, I saw him, and he said “Secretary of State I’d like a few words” “ No I haven’t time for that.” He said “It’s rather important, Secretary of State.” “No I’m sorry I can’t deal with that now.” Just like that.

CC: Without even knowing what it was.

WF: Talking about George Brown (I’m not sure if this should be recorded or not) but the Head of our Department Don McCarthy, a great chap, told me once he wanted to go and see – they’d got some desperate telegram in from Aden which was boiling at that time with one thing or another – and he went to the Private Secretary and said “I want to see the Secretary of State, we’ve had a very important telegram in.” ‘You can’t see him.’ He said “No it’s important that I see him, please stand aside”. “No you can’t see him.” “Listen I’m the Head of the Department and it’s important that I see him.” “You can’t see him, he’s slogged out of his mind!” (laughter) But it was said, I think it was admitted that George Brown was bright and had political courage, and he did work very hard, and at his time of his choosing and after two in the morning after everyone had been working all day and he hadn’t because he’d been drunk, he’d wake up! I don’t know if that should be recorded or not.

CC: Anyway, because you were not happy there and you transferred to PUSD.

WF: Yes I asked for a transfer, and PUSD was wonderful, right up my street, sort of maverick. It’s the only Government department I’ve had drinks before, during and after lunch! They were a little bit boy scout’ish in a way, you know, there were all these wonderful schemes; some were very clever and some not at all, just playing games.

I remember the Head of the Sovbloc Attack Department saying to me seriously “There will always be this problem, we’ll never be out of a job in Sovbloc, in fact it’s going to go on for ever. (Laughter)

I used to love going to lecture on the Foreign Office, on what it was about. There were a lot of pretty girls who had a certain amount of class too – anyway, one shouldn’t say that

nowadays perhaps, but you know a lot of them were debutante kind of girls one thought, I may be wrong. But it was a mixture and it was very nice.

A fun thing we did there was we had a hijacking practice, it was all secret but now I don't know – an RAF VC10 or whatever it was, was flown out with Arabic speakers in it, some real Arabs and some Foreign Office, and it was supposed to be hijacked and landed in Cyprus on the base Akrotiri and I was playing the role of a First Secretary in the Embassy and Hayman was playing - he later came to a very sad ending you may remember, Peter Hayman, Canada? – he was playing a sort of Ambassador role. And we stayed very comfortably in Military circumstances of course. And we were sending messages backwards and forward in Arabic and we had a line to Mrs Thatcher in Downing Street, and the SAS were there in black and with sort of violin cases, like the Mafia.

After a while it was decided that the aircraft should be stormed so the military went around the back and various points and came back and stormed the aircraft, various noises were heard, and the people were led off the airplane. The RAF doctor who was woken up was very displeased because the military had been a bit rough with people who had various injuries and he hadn't been told about this whole thing, and he was got up in the middle of the night to come and sort out the people who had been mildly damaged.

I went back in the plane, an RAF plane, with the Colonel commanding the military contingent and I remember him saying to me “I don't want thugs in my outfit at all, I want people who can be sitting on a mountain for 24 hours with nothing to do and keep themselves self-possessed and know what they're doing, they can read a book they can do something, but I don't want thugs, I want thinking people with judgement.” I thought that was reassuring.

CC: Yes, I mean you can get thugs anywhere.

WF: Yes you can.

CC: So PUSD, that was for about 18 months?

WF: Yes it was, yes it was good.

**Counsellor Economic/Commercial, Islamabad, Consul General Northern Pakistan,  
1980-83**

CC: And then out to Islamabad?

WF: Yes, that was good again.

CC: Not Arab but Muslim.

WF: Yes, and relevant to Persian in some ways. But that was another twist of fate because they had me down for Accra in Ghana - to be promoted to Counsellor and go to Ghana. Well I thought nice to be promoted Counsellor but I don't want to go to Ghana. I wasn't interested in black Africa and West Africa in particular. I'd already done Shell in East Africa. So I rang up Adrian Beamish I think it was, you remember him? He was in Personnel and I rang him up and said "Look, I put on my preference forms Middle East - Islamabad, Turkey, whatever, and do I have to go to Ghana?" And surprisingly he said "No, that doesn't sound sensible, I'll see what we can do." They had another meeting and we got Islamabad.

CC: That makes sense.

WF: Absolutely. I mean this was a surprise, having voted one way in their Personnel meeting they then came back and did it all again. And that was great fun, we enjoyed that.

CC: 1980-83, Deputy Head of Mission.

WF: Yes, that was very good.

CC: Counsellor Economic/Commercial, Consul General northern Pakistan.

WF: Yes that gave me licence to travel! Oliver Forster was the High Commissioner, he was very relaxed, very keen on acting. More keen on acting than most other things, because when there was a bicycle factory being opened in Lahore by the President Zia ul Haq, a

British bicycle factory in Pakistan and the President was going to be there, and Oliver was too busy rehearsing to go! (Laughter)

CC: He had his priorities worked out!

WF: Yes! So I went – super, much enjoyed it - met the President, shook his hand and all the rest of it. So that was good. And we took part in a play or two ourselves. I do remember a Gilbert and Sullivan being put on and Oliver being the Major-General, a Modern Major-General – remember? And in the Diplomatic Corps, I just wondered what people like the Chinese Ambassador made of the British High Commissioner dressed up as a ‘Modern Major General’ and singing these funny songs. I don’t think they do that kind of thing. (laughter)

CC: So, wonderful travels?

WF: Yes we got all round, we went all the way up to Chitral and Skardu and all those places, Baluchistan, Swat Valley, Sind, and it was all perfectly safe. And you stayed in rest houses where you got British Raj type things, mulligatawny soup and roast meat and two veg, and those sorts of things, absolutely redolent of the Raj. There were so many mixtures of things there, there was serious Islam, there was different kind of Islam, there was the Raj, there was Mogul, all these sorts of strands in Pakistan. It sort of worked in those days; I mean I’m sure the Christians had a rough time now and again but not like they have had since, it wasn’t like that then.

And Zia, I mean the lid was on, he was a military dictator pretty well, he was a bit over-religious which didn’t help in that way and of course the Afghan thing was boiling, so we were helping them get rid of the Russians. MI6 involved in that for sure. But you could do interesting things and we went on the railway up the Khyber Pass where my wife was offered various drugs and things on the way up, and I remember standing in the cab of the engine, we went on the engine to come back and I said to the engine driver “What’s that big parcel you’re putting under the floor?” “That is the smuggling” he said.

CC: Quite open about it. Drugs or what?

WF: Yes quite open, could have been radios or anything like that. And the train passed straight across the runway of the next airport down there too, so we had to wait for the aircraft to take off. Lots of steam. Wonderful. Also which was interesting was that being - they wanted aid of course and they wanted to make hospitals in various remote parts and I was in charge of the Aid Programme, so I could say well I'll have to go and see the thing. So we were able to go all along the Northwest Frontier Province which is where the Taliban and Co have subsequently emerged from or lurked. There again we stayed in militia messes, which was Raj all over again, on the walls there'd be pictures of British Commanding Officers with their Martini Henry rifles, going way back, and there'd be a billiard table made in Bombay, and the servants would have white gloves and gym shoes would be white. You couldn't get a drink there of course, but apart from that it was redolent of the Raj. Then we were given some militia escorts, all these splendid tribal people sitting in the back of jeeps with guns and bandoliers and all that. And off we'd go into tribal territory. I remember we stopped at one point there was a thunder storm going on in the distance over the mountain and Arlene jumped out to take a photo, and the major comes running down "Please get back in the car, there could be a sniper over on that hill - there's tribal tension!" When we got to Razmak, 8,000 feet up, an old British post with something called a Queen Alexandria picket, which shows you how redolent of the Raj it was. And we were having a drink with the Governor, and he said "You know we started a bus service here a few weeks back and on day one the whole bus was kidnapped with everybody in it, so we had to buy them all back again!" You also got Raj again, you got an ancient British teacher there whose name I've forgotten, they had a school, a bit on public school lines and with tribal boys in it. And they revered this ancient British school teacher who was the old school, naturally, had lived there for yonks, there were about three of them in Pakistan in places like that. And when there was some tribal dispute with a boy and you know things got out of hand, he would be the adjudicator and they'd do what he said. They saw him as being from the Raj and the Raj was something in those days. They were tribal people they respected this sort of thing. It was very interesting going up there. Also I remember Arlene said "could we go for a walk, perhaps up that hill?" Well first we have to clear the hill so we have to put the militia up, make sure there's nobody there, and then we could have a walk - so we said no don't bother!

CC: You said there was purdah.

WF: Yes very strict.

CC: Did you see the women at all?

WF: You'd see them around like this (gesture: covered)

CC: They accepted Arlene?

WF: She would wear a Shalwah Khamise, Pakistani dress, but she didn't have to be veiled, but she would be modestly covered and wore Pakistani dress.

CC: But they would speak to her and treat her as an honorary man?

WF: Well yes they would, but some people would be a bit askance you know.

In Banu there was hospital run by Dr Ruth Cogan, daughter of the Archbishop of Canterbury, with about six women doctors, they weren't all doctors, three or four were nurses, and they ran this hospital with amazing courage. In Banu, right on the frontier with the tribal area so it was very tribal, and they ran this hospital and they were accepted, slowly, because women could be looked at by them because they were women doctors, so this was very wonderful. Men weren't so sure about being treated.

It was very brave of them to stay there because you know it was a very, very tribal and religious, old fashioned sort of place. There was one British woman supposed to be there who had married a local years before and Ruth I think said would she like to be visited, but she said No, no, I've thrown my lot in here, I can't complain now. So she was stuck there, happily or not I don't know. But they were very brave women I thought, doing that.

Another interesting thing – there was something called the Asian Study Group and this was a group of mainly Diplomatic and other people, and Arlene became President of it and she started saying we ought to get Pakistanis in here, important Pakistanis. Under Zia Ministers weren't really supposed to do things like attending British study groups but the Ministers were really rather keen to do so because they were interested and interesting. And Arlene got them in. We actually got on occasion various people, and one very senior official made some rather rude comments, critical comments about the Minister, who was also there. And the Minister said “Well look, at the next meeting I would like to reply to that”, and he did.

So we got this sort of thing going, with senior Pakistani officials and a Minister in our house with various diplomats and other people taking part in this, and this was an unheard-of sort of going on. And rather fun, the Pakistanis all knew *Yes Minister*, or *Yes Prime Minister*, whichever it was at the time, and we got a particularly relevant one about administration, and we played that, and they loved it, the Pakistanis knew exactly what it was all about and they loved the situation. So we had the Minister, we had the senior official and we had the programme *Yes Minister*, and they loved it.

It was a great success and it expanded very largely and we had very interesting lectures and talks and travelled about the place, and she really got that going. We also had a famous dancer called Nahid Siddiqui who came out from England, and this was very dodgy – a woman, who danced?! and the Ministers queuing up to come!

CC: She was of Pakistani origin?

WF: Yes, she came from Birmingham I think and she came out and then gave a performance and the Pakistani Ministers queuing up to attend!

CC: They always came on their own I suppose, no wives?

WF: Well no, some of the women were about. Yes there was a Pakistani woman who became Pakistani Ambassador to Washington at the time. And the Head of Family Planning was a woman, a doctor. Oh yes they would come, but they all had pretty impressive backgrounds of course. The woman, her name will come to me, and her mother was the descendant of a holy man in the Punjab, and was still regarded as rather holy herself, and we went to stay there. When she went through her village or one of her villages, there would be four or five men on this side with a sheet, and four or five men on that side carrying a big sheet, and she would go down the street between the sheets, so she didn't have to do this herself, but these men were carrying the sheets on either side of her. Great respect. Feudal. There was a lot of feudalism in Pakistan, there probably still is.

The name of the woman who was Ambassador was Abida Hussein, and her husband was Fakar Imam who was a Minister and was the Minister came to the house - and we've been in touch with him since, they have a flat here, and we still see them.

CC: You mention the Falklands War and the Pakistani view on that.

WF: Yes, it was going on and Pakistanis you know had to be a little bit neutral but would take the Ambassador and say "Go on, go to it - we're sure you are going to win!" The Raj again you know, you could see a Pakistani Major General and a British Major General and hardly tell them apart except for their colour. It's changed now of course because the younger officers haven't had the background, but in the old days a lot of them had similar backgrounds so they knew.

I should mention Mrs Thatcher came and obviously it was very impressive, she flew in and flew out again in one day. There was a dinner party for her and so on, and she went down to Peshawar and saw the local General commanding there and there were fun and jokes going on down there, they all respected her of course, she was very tough. She made a speech at the dinner, but she was there for a short time only.

CC: She was an example of a woman again, being accepted as a man.

WF: Yes. And the military academy – again you might have been at Sandhurst. The military commander rode down the steps on a horse just like they do, or did, at Sandhurst, and gave a speech. Interesting Zia was keen on Urdu being spoken, as a true Pakistani nationalist, I heard him speak at that occasion and it was full of English words, you know these words kept coming in, you hear it all the time, even from him, he couldn't help it. He was a member of a famous regiment too [the Guides Cavalry], or had been, the old ancients from Britain would come out for the anniversaries and Zia went to do it, to be there, even if he didn't stay for the drinks. So there was that Raj link, still there.

CC: I suppose that was back in the 80's.

WF: Yes, some time ago.

### Ambassador to Somalia, 1983-87

CC: So then to Mogadishu, from 1983-87.

WF: Yes that was a lot of fun. I mean, what to do after Pakistan. I didn't want to go back to London and Yemen was coming up – now Yemen would have been good and it was an Arabist post, but they said, Well, there'd be competition for Yemen and we're not sure when it's going to happen - and it didn't happen for some time - but Somalia if you could go? And I thought why not, it sounds good, it's in the Arab League, it's warm and dusty.

So I said yes thank you very much, and we went there. We had a very nice house, it was safe in those days, it had a dictator – he was nothing like Saddam Hussein he wasn't in that class of dictator, but he was a dictator and he kept a lid on things and he shot some people and put some in prison who shouldn't have been and so on, absolutely not good.

CC: The NSS, what was that?

WF: The National Security Service. They inherited that from the Russians, you know they had been in the Russian camp, totally, but then the Russians decided to favour Ethiopia rather than Somalia, so they switched to the American camp. So the Russian Ambassador was sort of pooh-pooh'd and pushed aside and his Diplomatic bags would be opened and this kind of thing.

The Americans then became good and we weren't that important but OK, we were on that side. But again all the Colonial history was there a bit, and the BBC Arabic Service - the Somali service - broadcast an hour a day or whatever it was I forget how often, but when that came on if you went down the street in Mogadishu every little shop which had a radio had a cluster of people listening to the BBC. The Government hated it. They said these are dissident Somalis sitting in London and of course they were telling various truths which the Government didn't want to hear. And I was summoned regularly to the Foreign Ministry and they said Why don't you control them? Nobody like the Somalis could believe that the Government wouldn't be running a radio station, absurd, I mean no Government doesn't control the radio. But it was a hard message to get across that it was independent.

Then there was an occasion to do with Ireland and there was going to be some programme and some IRA or others were going to be interviewed or something on the television, and it was stopped – the Somalis were on to that in a flash – You’ve been telling us all this, what about the Irish?

CC: Collapse of stout party!

WF: Yes absolutely. And of course they blamed us. There’s a piece of land, the Ogaden, which was divided in the Colonial era, and we gave most of it to Ethiopia and Somalia has never forgotten that, so you always got that lecture as well, when you went there.

But it was my sort of place really, I mean, you know the petrol would run out altogether so I imported into Djibouti 44 gallon drums of petrol. And we had a tank in the Embassy yard and a little lorry, and all the other diplomats were jealous as hell.

CC: Why did they not do the same?

WF: Oh I don’t know, hadn’t got the wit, or the money or something. Funnily the Foreign Office were very good about it, I thought they were bound to say no, it’s all off-side you can’t do that, but amazingly they said yes. And also they allowed our Embassy, the building which was very old and owned by the administration officer’s family, to be entirely redone by the Chinese building company which was there doing work; and so they put in a swimming pool and they restored in a nice old-fashioned way, our buildings. I was impressed by the Office allowing all that to happen. The Chinese workers were impressive, they grew all their own vegetables, had their own place and they didn’t mix, they were self-contained. They were pleasant enough and their Ambassador was nice, and I actually had some acupuncture arranged by the Chinese Ambassador – it’s got to be the real thing you know, by the Chinese!

CC: Did it cure you?

WF: Not particularly, no but it was good. We would go to parties there, there was a nice party we went to once and when we walked through the door Arlene realised there were no women in sight, she was the only one. The Chinese rallied magnificently - there was a little

kerfuffle, the Ambassador gave quick instructions and in no time Mrs Ambassador was produced with a series of Chinese ladies. Wonderful!

CC: Sharp of him to spot that.

WF: Oh yes, it was good of him, very good of him.

There was an interesting thing, there were several wonderful beaches but there were very ferocious sharks. In town there were lovely beaches but the Russians had built an abattoir right there so the sharks were all around because of the blood, and little Somali boys, it used to happen, would kick a football into the sea, they'd run in and – schukk - gone. So we didn't go anywhere near there, obviously, but we all had nice beaches some miles out at which we used to swim cautiously.

We used to say well you know, the reef is there and behind the reef it's probably alright at low tide, swim cautiously, yes. And it all went well until one day an Italian went in up to his waist and was bitten by a shark, it got his leg and he got its mouth with his hands and sort of forced it off himself, like this, and there were some Italians on the beach with him, they all had hysterics of course, but there were some ice cold Swedish nurse ladies, what they were doing there I can't imagine, but they knew exactly what to do. And he was carried off and amputated and came back six months later with a wooden leg.

Sharks swim in very shallow water you know, I think they were Zambezi River sharks, why the Zambezi river I don't know, but anyway. There was also a Somali/British little girl who was taken totally sometime after that, so we all became much more careful when swimming from then on. But the beaches were still lovely, beautiful, untouched.

CC: It must have been a huge temptation to go into the water.

WF: Oh yes, it was. And there were some Italians there; it had been Italian, and they had a banana plantation down in the south, in the bit which was reasonably fertile; and they would have wonderful parties, and pitch a tent on the beach and gin and tonics galore and things you know. And a patrol man to see if there weren't any sharks in that particular bit of water, so you could go in it – there were a remnant of those Italian days.

CC: The Italians love their beaches.

WF: Yes the Italians were there in some force, still at the university and as doctors. We had a little aid programme which was trying to do things about mosquitoes and we had some white Rhodesians, Zimbabweans I suppose they would be, flying aeroplanes, and some flying military planes too.

Again the travelling was terrific, we went all over the place. The American Ambassador was quite game and he had an aeroplane. So we went up once drove to the North, to Hargeisa which had been British, and then we went from there in land rovers and on foot and in a boat, and we went and stood on the Horn of Africa, the very tip, and there was an Italian lighthouse which hadn't worked for God knows how long, but it was kept there in a reasonable state. It was very arduous and splendid journey though, people didn't do that, I suppose they didn't have the imagination to do it.

CC: Fascinating when you think you couldn't go near it now.

WF: No, no, total chaos now.

CC: You had visits from Linda Chalker?

WF: She came, Malcolm Rifkind came. The President saw people late at night, at midnight or 11, after he had smoked his cigarettes. We did see him sometimes, it was alarming as you'd go up to the Presidential Palace and a great spotlight would shine on your face and the guards, who all looked about 16, young boys in khaki uniforms. And the President used to come to the theatre now and then and they'd have a special performance. And we'd all be sitting there and suddenly the doors would crash open and in he'd come, with all these awful little boys with great guns. Great God, supposing one of them trips! I remember a large rat ran over my DA's foot on one occasion.

CC: Just as well it wasn't over one of these little boys' feet!

WF: Yes, absolutely. (Laughter) It was that sort of life, it was interesting.

Somali Airlines were splendid, they had two 707s, fortunately they were maintained by Lufthansa, they had a little team there, otherwise one would never have gone near them. But they told us, Lufthansa, that the pilots were OK, so we did use them now and then. But there would be events like one of them came in one day and hit two cows on the runway, so that was out of order for some days; or the President would decide he was going somewhere and he'd take the 707, so all of them were cancelled for umpteen days. Or there was a lovely occasion when they had a forklift truck and they were driving it along, and they pushed it through the side of the airplane instead of through the door so there were two holes in the plane! They had two F27s; one of them had been crashed with all on board – because the pilot had said apparently “I'm not flying this thing, it's not safe.” And he'd been told “Go and do what you're told, go on!” So he did, and crashed and they were all dead. We went in the other one, but we were reassured when there was a Lufthansa airhostess on it, funnily enough, why I don't know, but she was on it and so we thought it was probably alright. We got to the place and bounced down the runway - boom-ba- boom-ba-boom! We were glad to be back on the ground!

There was the old British Residents' Palace up in Hargeisa, that area had been British, in Hargeisa in the North. That area, it was a slightly different kind of Somalia; now they're pretty well independent and they don't want to be joined to the south again. One of the things I do when I remember it is to write to the Foreign Office saying why the hell don't you recognise those people? And I get a sort of pompous answer. Because they are independent in every other way and they are real, I mean they function unlike the rest of the country. They're different kind of Somali, called Isak. Anyway, I was to go up there and travel in the land rover and visit our aid projects. We made sure the aid projects were sound. When you hear on the wireless now about wasting Government money, it's true. But we would give ours to NGOs like Action Aid and make sure that it was for putting in a water course, or digging a well, or something like that. And I would go up and visit these and we'd be sitting round a sort of mutton-grab in the evening, and I'd have the NSS police guard sitting there behind me. And these tribal people would stand up and start poetry – it was an oral society and they were doing poetry - and it would be all about ‘The British should come again, the British would go home and society's no good’ and I would look uneasy, and it all had to be interpreted for me because I didn't speak Somali, and they were telling me this is what they are singing! And it was all like that, they didn't like the Somalis of the South, they preferred us. Not allowed to say that nowadays, but there we are, they did.

There was a British sugar factory down in the south which worked more or less, it was quite good. But aid again - the sort of thing I used to worry about; there was a philosophy in the (what were they called, they weren't DfID, anyway the people in the government,) that you should hand over to a project as quickly as possible otherwise you'd be Colonial. So you build a power station, put it there, train them up, go off - otherwise you're Colonialist. And I said that's nonsense because you know you give a Somali a power station up in Hargeisa or wherever it is, train him for a year, say it's over to you, six months after he gets a message his mother's aunt is dying in Kisimayu - he's gone. Nobody's putting oil in the thing - SCRRRSH. They hadn't got any money for spare parts. So I said if you are going to do a thing like that, you've got to have somebody there for five years easily, or visiting regularly, and you've got to have spare parts paid for, for ten years. Otherwise don't bother with it. There were Romanian paid-for fish factories lying rotting with nothing happening, the Somalis don't eat fish! And the whole idea of organising it for export was beyond everybody. So there were a lot of dead aid projects there. It was all a graveyard of those - ugh. But there were lovely things like dhows in the harbour going off to Muscat and places like that.

CC: Somalian ingratitude you mention here.

WF: Yes, the Somalis were demanding - Richard Burton, you know the great explorer, when he was there in the C19th he called it the Land of Give Me Something. And the American Ambassador wrote a book, and I told him this and he put it in the book and he thought it was absolutely right. They were very ungrateful, they expected it, you know I'm a nomad we give you what we've got, you give us what you've got. But they never had anything to give, but other people did. And it was rumoured and I think it was probably true, that the Saudis shipped in on one occasion - they used to run out of petrol, they had an oil refinery and which would give 75 octane and you could hear all the lorries pinking horribly throughout the town, and they often used to run out. And the Saudis would ship them in say 30,000 tons in a tanker. And there was one occasion when they'd done this and then the Somalis arrested them as they hadn't paid the harbour dues. So the captain said, I know, but telexes are on the way, and all that. No, no, you haven't paid, to prison, and arrested the ship.

And then they would be surprised, genuinely surprised, that the Saudis weren't keen to do it again – Why aren't they sending us more?

CC: So it's a genuine characteristic?

WF: Yeah, it's a slightly Bedouin characteristic, if you don't have anything much you are used to just taking and being given. And you are supposed to be the same, if there's only one rabbit and you've got half of it and somebody comes along, you're supposed share it. That hospitality thing is of course there, it does exist.

There was another story, it was in a book actually by a British chap who was trying to set up a turtle processing factory and there's not much turtle. But he had once found a baby under a bush in the desert and he thought this is terrible, and he picked it up and took it to the police station. And the police said "Don't bring that here, it's been abandoned. We'll look after it but you are not doing it a service because it will grow up, it's been deliberately abandoned there by a tribe because they couldn't feed it, and so it's been left to die on purpose. If you bring it to us now we can feed it, but it's got no tribe, it's got no family and nowhere to go – what's going to happen when it's six, ten years old? It won't know where it's from or what to do, so you should have left it."

CC: Does the story go on?

WF: No, I don't know what happened to it. It was then dark and they didn't put it back there, but you know, it was that sort of attitude, it's a tough life. They had their camels, they had their goats and their sheep. Apart from some agriculture in the South they didn't have anything else. You have to be very tough. And they always explored for oil, but dry as a bone. I think they've been doing it again since, but I went with Shell and they flew me and the German Ambassador up in a jet all the way to Djibouti and we went out on their rig. And we took another airplane or helicopter to the rig, and they said there isn't even water at the bottom on this well, there's nothing!

CC: But they still drilled?

WF: They drilled to see, just exploratory, but they found nothing. It was a very Somali matter I think that, very typical.

CC: There, though, again Arlene founded the British Ladies in Somalia Society and the International Ladies Association.

WF: Yes, I should talk about that, she had a wonderful idea. There were a few wives, aid people and others, and what to do? So she started BLIS, the British Ladies in Somalia. They met and they did things, and they had events and also the International Ladies Association she set up, and that was for diplomats and everybody. The Somali Prime Minister's wife got interested - he had two wives - and one of them got very interested and she would say to the other wife, 'You can have the Minister, I'm having the ILA', so she came to do this, and they had an aid programme, they were going to build a well and they got some interference from the bureaucracy 'You can't build a well there, you don't have permission, it's against the rules - you know, obstructing it. Probably wanting money, but anyway. So Arlene said OK we'll stop all that, and then she mentioned it to the wife: ten minutes later, permission - everything! But it did good, it was very well supported and very much liked because these women, you know the men would go to the office, and they didn't have much to do. And there weren't great options around: you could learn Arabic, you could sew, you could read a book. And the electricity was dodgy and the water was dodgy, but there was conversation and other people's interests. And you'd sit there looking out over the harbour, you could put on a video, then the electricity went off so you would think well what do we do now? So you'd look over the moon-lit water and the sea and the ships with their lights - it was OK.

There was a lovely occasion too when a ship went aground in the harbour, it was a Korean captain I think, Greek-owned inevitably, went aground on the rocks and it had a hell of a lot of soap powder on it - and bubbles were floating through the streets of Mogadishu, cars had fallen off on the impact and were on the bottom of the harbour, the Italian Ambassador for Kenya/Tanzania had all his personal effects on it and they were thrown off into the sea, poor chap. And there it sat, and in the evening as the tide went out there was this awful clanging noise as the ship rose a bit and clanked down, and rose a bit and down on the rocks again. Eventually a Dutch salvage company came and cut it to pieces and towed some of it away.

CC: Bubbles everywhere!

WF: Yes - It was a fun place.

My wife wrote a tract on Somali handicrafts with a Somali lady, which later got published in the Smithsonian Institute in Washington. It was a book called Space, Place and Gender, which we've got of course. It was about Africa as a whole but there was a big bit about Somalia, and Arlene with this Somali lady wrote bits on all these artcrafts that the Somalis made; I mean they made lovely things for containing milk, now you have plastic cans, but then they wove things and then they tested them in the fire and made them waterproof and the milk would go in there. There were a lot of things like that. So she did that too, and that was a good thing for her.

### **On loan to MoD, 1987-88**

CC: So you came back quite senior as Regional Marketing Director in the MoD – that's a bit of a change.

WF: Well it was but you know, I didn't want to be sort of Head of Southern European Department again or something like that, and the Middle East Department already had someone in it. So a friend of mine called Tony Harris was in the MoD, they had this Arabist post there because they were flogging bits and pieces and so on to the Arab world. DESO, the Defence Exports Services Organisation, they had an Arabist job there, and he'd been doing it and then he moved, so I did it, in Soho Square in a rather scruffy office. But it meant that one could fly around the world, and I thought it was slightly dodgy being an 'arms merchant of death' as my predecessor called it, but consoled oneself with the thought that these were all very friendly countries like Abu Dhabi and Dubai and Saudi Arabia who weren't in theory, and in practice, about to attack anybody in those days. Certainly it was all meant to be defensive stuff. So I did that.

CC: So there was the contrast with the MoD to the Arab Defence Ministries?

WF: Oh we'd go to the Defence Ministry in Abu Dhabi or Saudi Arabia, all marble halls and MoD would be people with dirty coffee cups on the corridors and bits of biscuit. It was always going to be like that, bit embarrassing when you took some Saudi Admiral to the MoD. I used to go with Lord Trefgarne, he was a nice genial sort of fellow, we used to get

into a little RAF jet and go and visit somewhere, Jeddah or somewhere, and they were quite fun to see and do, and we used to get on the occasional helicopter. And Colin Chandler, Head of Defence Sales and a big business man from British Aerospace, he then went off up to do greater things. So he was very easy and helpful to work with. Crown Prince Abdullah of the Saudi National Guard who later became King, I remember going there with Stephen Egerton and Colin Chandler. Stephen was Ambassador, he had a wicked sense of humour. Do you remember him?

CC: Yes, he was our Ambassador in Rome, and his wife Caroline.

WF: Of course. Four-letter words used to come tumbling out, very naughty. I remember we had a meeting with the National Guard once and there were all these sheiks sitting round the table, they were called T1, T2 and T3 by us, all their names all began with T. And after a while Stephen came along to add weight to the proceedings, and one of the sheikhs quoted some Arabic poetry and Stephen said "Ah yes, Al Mutannabi" who is a famous poet. They said "Nonsense it wasn't Al Mutannabi at all, it was Umr Ibn Ar Rabi'a", or something like that. And I said to Stephen afterwards "Stephen I know you are a classical scholar and I know you have some Arabic, but you don't know much about Arabic poetry." "No my dear boy! If ever I hear any I always say Al Mutannabi and if I'm right they are very impressed and if I'm wrong they are delighted to put down the British Ambassador" (Laughter). I remember at a dinner party at his Residence there was a picture of the King who'd been to England and been given the GCMG, I suppose they have a cross in it somewhere, and Stephen said "I never thought I'd see the King wearing a cross!" (Laughter).

CC: Did he get away with that?

WF: Yes, but he used to frighten me when we were sitting there at a meeting with the PA and other girls and a whole lot of four-letter words would come tumbling out – I went to see the f'ing Minister of this, and so on.

CC: I always thought it was rather a surprise, actually.

WF: I did too.

WF: The aeroplanes were fun too because I remember being in a Saudi DC6 at Jeddah airport and it was full of sheiks with falcons on their wrists, hawks. Either lying there trussed on the seat or on their wrists. And the Lebanese air hostess, who was a woman, was sent by the American pilot to say this wasn't on, you can't have these live things on board. And of course she didn't say anything at all, how could she? In Saudi Arabia? Of course she didn't get anywhere - the very idea of a woman?! Coming from Lebanon, coming at the behest of an American, a Christian up the front?! Poouff – not having that one! And I remember seeing an occasion when a DC3 – a whole flock of Arabs just fighting to get into the aeroplane. And the pilot, an American again, who was sitting there said “I will not take the goddam plane off, 3,000 lbs overweight.” [Laughter].

CC: History doesn't tell you whether he did or not.

WF: No! Oh dear.

CC: So it had its moments, didn't it!

WF: Yes – I went to Pakistan with two British Admirals - of course one of them immediately discovered he'd been at Dartmouth with the Pakistani Chief of the Naval Staff, and that was very nice. I went to Yemen, and funnily enough though, I rode down in a land rover down the coast with a grade 10 in the Embassy. And he said “You know the Ambassador wants us to call him by his Christian name and I don't think I like it, we don't know where we are.”

CC: Same story!

WF: Yes!

### **Governor, Falkland Islands, 1988-92**

CC: Now to the Falkland Islands as Governor, 1988-92. Was your wife happy to go so far way?

WF: Yes she was, she found it perhaps less satisfying than some of the Ambassadorial ones, but it was OK and again she had a lot to do there too. I was sitting in the MoD one day,

thinking it would probably be another year or so, going to somewhere in the Middle East, but I got a call saying would we like to think about being Governor of the Falkland Islands. Completely out of the blue, it had never occurred to me doing anything like that. But they said well, you know all about the MoD and of course there was a big military contingent of 2,000 on the Islands, and you expressed interest in travelling in remote places. So there you go. Well I was happy with that, I had to go and have an interview with Geoffrey Howe to see if I was suitable and of course you had to go across the road to Mrs T, and I remember Geoffrey Howe said “Well what do you think about doing things with Argentina?” So I said “Well of course absolutely rock solid about the position we’ve got, but I imagine one day there will be some sort of thaw, not that the Islands will be given to them, anything like that, but we have very good relations and you know while the Falklands are not involved it would be more normal.” He said “You’d better not say that over the road!” (Laughter)

So I went over and Charles Powell met me and said she’s not as bad, don’t worry about it. And we sat there and if she wanted to know about me I don’t know how she was going to find out because she did all the talking. We had a cup of tea and she was very nice. She said “Have you been there?” And I said No. “Would you like to go and look first?” Goodness, the thought of going all the way out there just to look and then come back, and was I going to say NO after all that? So I said “No, no, I’m sure it’ll be fine, it’s good.”

CC: I suppose it was a nice gesture.

WF: Oh yes, it was a nice grandiose gesture. She maintained that interest in the Islands of course, it was her thing. It was a very interesting job, actually, it was very active. People said aren’t you going to be bored - not a bit of it, we were more visited there than any other place we’ve ever been in. We had MPs in droves, we had Secretaries of State of all kinds, we had scientists, we had fishermen and fishing companies, we had tourists for fishing or for battlefield tours, for philately, we had people going to the Antarctic, and doing an Antarctic survey. So we had rows of visitors all the time.

It was a hands-on job – you were Chairman in the Executive Council, you didn’t vote but you steered and you took an interest; and you were President of the little Parliament (LegCo.) with its eight members; and you had an executive and you had an Attorney General who was a QC no less; you had a Chief Executive who was brought in from outside, a businessman or

whoever he was; you had a finance chap, who we also brought in till we localised it. So those were all in the Government. And then you had the Councillors, these people sat in on the Executive Council meetings, but the Councillors had to take the decisions. Only if it was a matter of foreign affairs and there wasn't much of that, of course, it was obviously for the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defence the Military Commander sat in on ExCo as well, and on the LegCo.

But you were really in there, you know, at the end of the LegCo and ExCo you broadcast on the radio to say what had been discussed and agreed and how it was all working. And you were always being asked to make a comment, or open things or close things. Arlene was always opening things and closing things, always 'Would you say a few words' - you had to be ready for that. But it was OK. There was a suspicion among the Islanders about the Foreign Office, not without reason because in the past it had looked rather as though the Foreign Office thought it was a bit of a bore, the Falklands, we thought we can't be nasty about it but wouldn't it be nice if there was some arrangement could be made, and so they were a bit suspicious. And then some British chap arrives who'd never been anywhere near the Falklands before, as Governor. But if you showed that you were on their side, which I was, and you were interested, which I was, and that you were sympathetic, you know it worked, it began to work. And they were interesting people.

CC: You dissolved the Parliament once?

WF: I did once. It was partly because they couldn't agree amongst themselves on a certain issue and I said this is going nowhere, because you're not going to agree, so no more Parliament for the time being. It made a bit in the Daily Telegraph, James Craig sort of noticed it and apparently said what are you going to get up to now? But it was OK. We didn't cause any huge drama. But you felt you were really stirring the pot and being in there rather than being an Ambassador and just reporting on things. And when HMG renewed diplomatic relations with Argentina the Council wanted you to explain why - "Don't worry this isn't suspicious, it's going to be alright." There was diplomacy of that kind. There was the question of how many members of police force should there be? Some Islanders said 16 were too many, others No we didn't need that number; and you had to steer and had an interest in that and be part of it, and you were technically head of the thing, considering you were the Queen! And so the little defence force of 50 people was your army.

There was a lot of interest from the world press still, and you had interviews to give to the foreign television stations and you were rung up from New York, so you had to get quite used to that sort of thing. It was interesting. The military was fun, I like the military, I always have, and I had a lot to do with them, they were always helicoptering one around the place or going for things there, and I thought they were a lot of fun; and we went down in a submarine and so on. So that was a welcome extra layer on top. We had the Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey, he came with his wife.

CC: The Thatchers?

WF: They came.

The fun about the Cathedral was, I'm not a religious person but if I ever went to the Cathedral which I had to do of course, the National Anthem had to be played if I entered it, so all the Island knew whether I was going to church or not!

CC: They all stood for it I suppose?

WF: Yes, and I had to sit in the front of course and read Lessons frequently. We had a very nice Dean called Gerry Murphy who was ex-Irish Guards and a great ex-rugger player, and so on. A very nice, gentle sounding sort of person. And then we had a naval chap who'd been in the Navy who was a different kettle-of-fish but OK, that was good. But I liked the old form of words in the Church of England, I won't listen to the new ones. Now and then they would try in a service to have the new one, but if I was going to read the Lesson I'd always get my secretary to type out the old version and I'd have it in my pocket and I'd bring it out and put it there and read it.

CC: It's like poetry, isn't it.

WF: Yes, beautiful, I love all that, love all that.

CC: And the other visitors, there were some of the families of those killed?

WF: Yes they came out, the Islanders were very sympathetic to the British families obviously, but then the Argentines were going to come and Arlene got a bunch of Falklands women together and said Look we've got to do the decent thing with these people. And they were all for it up to a point, but then some of the expatriate women said no this was wrong, these people had attacked and killed people, and they were steered off. So the Islanders then said they didn't want anything to do with it. Thank God for the military. They immediately said we'll do it. And they did it, very well and they were totally sympathetic and the Argentines felt very well looked after, these poor women and miserable relatives saw these crosses row on row, and often with Name Unknown.

CC: It was more relevant the military doing it.

WF: Oh yes it was, and they gave them cups of tea after, and it was very good. A little disappointing that the Islanders didn't come up to scratch on that, it was a bit sad that.

CC: You had some sheep?

WF: I had a flock of 10 or 12. Because we had paddocks round Government House and the Public Works Department said they couldn't really stretch to mowing this. So I got these sheep, and they were a great success and the military had a lot of time-expired biscuits and I used to feed these to the sheep who loved them and they liked cigarettes too, because it's tobacco, a sort of leaf, so I would feed them these things, they liked it. And I had a ewe which I and the vet, mainly the vet, had inseminated, and it produced triplets which was sort of above the Island's average. (Laughter)

CC: did you shear them?

WF: Yes, I have a pullover. I got some Jacobs later, you know black and white, and I have a pullover down in Cornwall woven from that, so we did shear them, yes. I would go down to the fence in the evening and they'd come and I'd feed them these things. It was very good fun. And also it was a bit of being an Islander, you know, the Island is full of sheep, so there we were.

The MoD were interesting, you know all the top brass came all the time, Ministry of Defence staff, Admirals, Generals, you name it, and I used to say to them – they used to grumble about the cost – and the British press used to publish “£100m, terrible, Falklands we can’t afford it.” So I said to the MoD tell me exactly what it costs. And they said well it costs about £60m, but that includes the salaries and wages of all the people who were in the Army anyway there, and so if they were anywhere else they would still be paid.

So I was able to publish some of this factually; and also I kept saying to these top brass, you know here you are allowed to fly your jets at zero feet round the Island and apart from lambing time nobody complains; you run an infantry company which stumps around the Island and lets off all its explosives on a range; you’ve got a Navy ship. The last Naval commander said to me he’d never been so happy because he was 8,000 miles from the Admiralty and he had a ship and did what he had to do. And this is wonderful training. And there was a contingent in South Georgia, of 44. And I remember the young commander there, he was a Lieutenant or something, said to me “This is why I joined the Army! If I’m going to spend my life on Salisbury Plain, I’m going to leave”. I said this to these top people and they said 44 is a bit hard to find. Come on - out of 180,000 or something, you can find 44! The Army’s so difficult - Ahh - But you know, it was hard graft. Then the air bridge, the aircraft, the Tristar, came out twice a week to the Falklands. When Gulf War happened, all we had to do was turn it to the Gulf, all the Tristars. If we hadn’t had this working land bridge, I don’t think they’d have had that. So all they had to do was just turn it round, and to hire civil ones for the meantime for us.

CC: Politically they couldn’t have cut it down.

WF: No I don’t think so. Now they have, it’s a one-star instead of two, and there are probably 1,000 people instead of 2,000. And of course now we have the air base and that’s working and there are still some jets out there. But I think it’s a very good experience for young troops to do that. And they can’t be expected to be on Salisbury Plain all the time or what the equivalent is, so it’s OK.

CC: You were concurrently Commissioner for South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands and British Antarctic Territory?

WF: Yes that came into it. But the local life, you know the boards and the town hall, the beauty queen to be selected, the races, the prizes to be given out, all this kind of thing - they were very keen on the races, they were very basic races, I mean not very long, very simple. And farms you had to visit constantly. We had this little airline, Falkland Islands Government Air Service (FIGAS), 9-seater Britain Norman Islanders, very nice little airplanes and you could land on grass strips. The farmer would come out and get the sheep off and you'd land.

CC: The population out there, it maintains itself?

WF: Yes it's gone up a bit, I think it's about 2,500 now.

CC: And they are content to be there?

WF: Well they come and go. I mean there were always British servicemen would come and one of them would marry a girl and they'd either go away or he'd stay; and an Islander would go away and then come back; and some people would come out and the Attorney General was a QC and he settled, he used to like it. So I think the numbers are still ... and they do come and go, and it's not as if they are stuck on the Island for ever. Since the war ended Mount Pleasant Airfield and the Tristar and all that, and now there are some local flights to Chile, so it's feasible to get away and the children are sent away for A level; they go to a college in England. Some come back, some go on to do degrees and things, so I think it'll go on. The squid fishery provides the money, it's had a bad year this time but normally it's a very good fishery and if you have squid in Northern Spain it's probably from the Falkland Islands. And all these fleets come and the Islanders issue licences. And some of the Falkland Islanders have joined into companies or made companies, but basically it's a matter of selling licences. And they are very good with conservation, they take serious advice from London University about where to do it and they will reduce the number of licences if they feel it has to stop. And they have two patrol vessels, or they did in my day, who were constantly out there, they had an airplane because Taiwanese and others would nip into their zone and rush out again - we did catch some and bring them to port and confiscate their catch, and so on. And we did chase one Taiwanese all the way to Cape Town and then he ran out of fuel - wonderful! (Laughter) So that was all very interesting and very hands-on and very lively, and I liked that it very much.

The medical services were fun too – we had a couple of doctors on the Island and a little hospital, very good hospital. The surgical services were provided, not now I think, by the Royal Army Medical Corps. Every four months they would send out a surgeon and his team, with a Sergeant and so on, and they would do appendicitis or whatever happened – they had to do everything because they were the only people – emergencies could be flown to Montevideo but that was a bit more serious but these people did this and I remember an orthopaedic surgeon. He came to me one day and he said “You know, yesterday I did my first ever caesarean section and I think it went rather well.” (Laughter) So that was fun. Also the doctor would get on the wireless to some farm, and all the Islanders would listen in, and he’d say “I think in your medical cupboard you’ll find the box and you’ll find this sort of pill probably”. And somebody else would chime in “No I took that and it didn’t work!”

CC: So actually for an emergency people would go to Montevideo, which took how long?

WF: Not very long, sort of three or four hours probably. They could go back on the Tristar if it was really serious and it wasn’t in a hurry and they could go all the way back to England that way.

I didn’t tell you one story, I think it’s been published, but Mrs Thatcher came, we had the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Liberation. Mrs Thatcher of course was principal guest. All Generals, Admirals came, Sir Richard Vincent, the Chief of Defence Staff, Archie Hamilton the Minister. And they were put up in various houses and we had the Thatchers. She was very nice and she was a good guest, she was also retired by then. And I would go into the drawing room and find her on her knees poking the fire, saying I thought the fire was getting a bit low, you know, this sort of thing. Nice. And we had a gin and tonic now and then.

We had a Ball in the town hall, we had a banquet with speeches and the big question of course which I had to address, and I had to address it to the families, was: was it worth it? I lost my brother or son, or husband: was it worth it? And this had to be tackled, and I did in my speech in the town hall, and I said I hope that you will come round and you will see, all of those of you who have lost people, and everybody else, what the situation is now. The Islands are flourishing, it’s a proper democratic system, they are not being kept down, this was a foreign invasion by a foreign power who was not going to treat them particularly well

whatever they said, and now these people are free and they are working hard not sitting back getting hand-outs, they are getting things going very well. And so, I obviously, I haven't lost anybody and I might feel differently if I had, but I can only say that from everybody else's point of view it was worth it. I mean you couldn't possibly say anything else, could you. But I felt it was, and the death toll was 255 altogether, three Islanders I think, and the rest British. And that's dreadful enough. It's a successful country. Argentina is not really a successful country, even now.

CC: And it was Galtieri at the time.

WF: Yes, it was a mess. And it's a mess now. But I felt it was true, so I would say that I could genuinely say that, and did.

Anyway, one of the things we had was a service of thanksgiving in the cathedral. Very important. And the dean then was this young ex-Naval chap. About six weeks before he came to me with his briefcase, and he said "You know I'm going to give the sermon." And I said "Of course, because you're the dean." And he said "Well, I want to introduce a note of forgiveness into the sermon; you know, it's ten years after, Christianity is based on turn the other cheek, forgive- all this sort of stuff." And I couldn't argue, "I couldn't agree with you more, and you're the dean it's your prerogative, and absolutely. BUT, I have to tell you no one in the Falklands congregation has the slightest intention of forgiving Argentina for anything, and least of all the principal visitor, Mrs Thatcher has no intention of forgiving Argentina either!" So he said "I know, that's why I've come to see you." So he got out his briefcase and he read through the sermon. And I said there's a bit too much forgiveness in that line, or it would be a bit dodgy here, and we cobbled together a sermon with a thin line of forgiveness in it, but not hitting you in the face.

So came the day, and trumpets blew and everybody in their best uniforms. I read a lesson, Mrs Thatcher read a lesson, the Chief of the Defence Staff – the whole thing. Sermon. After the service I went to Mrs Thatcher and said what did you think of the sermon? She said she didn't like it. Full of forgiveness. So I said "But Mrs Thatcher it's unarguable, Christian theology, you have to forgive." "Well that may be, but I think (and you have to listen carefully) if someone does something so bad that you wouldn't forgive yourself if you did it, then you don't have to forgive them for doing it!" "I saw the Dean eyeing me across

the room at this point, and I went over to him and said "Try this for size" and I told him what she'd said. And he said "That is a new theology, that is not known to the Church of England!" And I went to Denis and I said what did you think of the sermon. "Bloody good, I thought, and a damn fine fellow!" (Laughter)

CC: I suppose in a way one wouldn't expect anything else.

WF: No. It's quite a tortuous presentation though, isn't it.

CC: Yes - and there you have it, a diplomatic life.

WF: Yes, yes.

WF: Anyway, so there we are. Arlene had a big role: President of the Girl Guides, the Corona Society, she got a YMCA hostel set up, she managed to find a home for a homeless person or two who were very grateful. You know, she was busy enough and doing all the things that she should do (running the large house, entertaining). I think she found Embassies more interesting because there's a broader element. Certainly it was not dull, I mean there was no sitting around or thinking what are we going to do today, and I had a sailing boat I used to sail as well, so that was fun.

It was very interesting, the Duke of Edinburgh came, we had him for four days.

CC: And you were senior to him.

WF: I outranked him, yes, but I didn't make it very obvious, I wasn't going to try that one! But I read the Colonial regulations and it said in a Crown Colony, there is nobody superior to the Governor except the Queen in person, unless she decrees otherwise. So I thought we're not going to make a protocol issue out of it unless he does, but I'll ring up the Palace and see if it's serious. And they said it is serious, you outrank him and she hasn't said anything. So there you are.

Well, needless to say if I have a guest in the house I invite him to go through a door before me, and all that kind of thing, but the funny thing was that the Governor had to be served first

always in the Falklands, and so at any meal or any event, always. My butler didn't like the Duke of Edinburgh very much and said no way was the Duke going to be served before the Governor! So the Duke would be seated at one end of the table and I at the other and one of the staff would serve the Duke, so he and I could be served at the same time. Don made sure it didn't happen, but the Duke didn't notice that kind of thing, he wasn't bothered. We took him fishing once to Chartres in West Falkland and we got him on the other bank, you can fish there and we were on the other. And there were two things remarkable about that. We landed on this Island in our little airplane, the owner of the farm had a Rolls Royce; he only had two miles of track in the middle of the island but he'd always wanted one. Anyway, the Duke got in the front so I got in the back, and we came to a gate, out gets the Duke opens the gate, we go through, he closes the gate and gets back in. I'm sitting there in the back, but he just did that, didn't think about it. I caught more fish than he and he caught a bigger one, thank goodness, so that was alright. But he came down to the bank after fishing and said "Let me help you carry your fish up to the car."

So on the one hand he can be quite tiresome, on the other hand he can be extremely agreeable, you see.

CC: When he's actually out and doing something, off duty almost.

WF: Yeah, I think so. He's seen it and done it all, that's the trouble. But then he was on the opposite bank and various swear words came over the air, and I said to his valet "What does this mean?" and he said "He's having lovely time, don't worry." (Laughter) So that was good.

CC: There were reindeer on South Georgia?

WF: South Georgia was fascinating, I was Commissioner for that which meant going down whenever one could, and one either went down on a Royal Naval auxiliary ship, you know one of these all-singing, all-dancing maintenance vessels. Or I went on a frigate because it had a helicopter and we were able to zoom round in that. It took three or four days to get there and three or four days back, and it's a beautiful island, it's very dramatic and the weather can change instantly, 9,000 foot peaks and snow and glaciers – lovely. Fishing goes on round it. And the whaling stations were of course basically Norwegian; I mean the

Japanese had them for about three years and then they all went away. There they are, crumbling, you could go into the medical store and find medicines on the shelves that they left; the film theatre had collapsed but there'd be reels of film on the ground; and the little chapel was there. I said this is ok, it's all very remarkable, but we must have a museum. Now the Government was me and the Chief Executive and the Attorney General. And I knew we'd got £20,000 in the bank, so I said "Let there be a museum." And the other two said "Indeed, let there be a museum." So this was the easiest bit of governing I'd ever done. And there it was.

So we produced the money and got various British Antarctic Survey and other people, who knew about this and had been in South Georgia. And it's there now, and it's visited by over 1,000 people a year from cruise ships – so much so that we are getting worried about the environment with all these people trampling about.

CC: There are people to run it?

WF: About two or three people down there looking after it, and the British Antarctic Survey, they used to have some people on Bird Island nearby, I think they've got someone there now. But you know you walk on all these ruins and find a great elephant seal in your path, and you have to go round it – it's wonderful. And all the machinery – there were whale capturing (harpooning) ships in a bit of dry dock half-dragged out of the water. And we tried to re-float one of those, and the military had a good try but we didn't manage. And now it's up and running and we brought from the other whaling stations, there were several round the place, for instance Leith Harbour, and we brought bits and pieces from those. And there it is, and it's been a great success. And that's South Georgia in on the map! The reindeer are very interesting. The Norwegians brought them as a food supply and of course you had to cull them because they were trapped in two areas, and they couldn't get out because of glaciers and mountains. So once they'd eaten all that down, you had to cull them. Now, because they are not basic to the Islands, it's been decided they should be killed and taken away, shot.

Because the idea of the South Georgia Association now is to bring everything back to a pristine state. They've got rid of the rats – I think they've just about got rid of them, it's difficult because if you put poison down other things can eat it. But it's been done, at some expense, and the reindeer have been removed because they were eating themselves out

anyway, and they weren't native. And the idea, they are very strongly conservation-minded, this group, and the Norwegians are still very interested and I get their magazine all in Norwegian except for a couple of paras in English. And I've been made an Honorary Fellow of it, and so it's up and running, a very successful venture, both the conservation of the islands, the ecology and all that, and the museum was doing very well. But it was fun to go down there, I mean it was a lovely virgin place. And the Navy were fun to go with always. One of the frigates that had been there came to me and said "Look we've found a classic dinghy up in the rafters of one of the warehouses, hanging there, and we think it could be saved." So when I went down next I got a Naval party and we got this thing down, and pushed it through the snow and took it back to the Falklands. And the Royal Naval shipwright said "No, it's rubbish, write it off." We had a Chilean shipwright there called Fluki, it was only a nick-name, I remember him, he said "I'll repair that." And he did and I watched him doing it by hand. Most of it was OK but he had to put some new planks in. And now I used it, I rowed out to my sailing boat and I used it a lot and I painted it.

You see the great thing about the Falklands is there is lot of stuff just lying around which you could just 'get'. So for example, when I found on Pebble Island this 22/19 foot sailing boat in a bad state and I thought we can do something with this. So when the little steamer came round, we put it on and we took it back. A round-the-world New Zealand yachtie who had been a ship builder but had stopped in the Islands said I can fix this; a person who owned a building company said I've got a warehouse you can put it in there for nothing; we found paint from a naval store that nobody wanted; Don Bonner, my butler/valet whatever you call him, had some lead ballast in his container somewhere so we got that; we wanted a buoy so the harbour master said there's a buoy down on the beach I think we could bring that in; so we did and we sand-blasted and painted it. Then we said we need some chain now – so down in South Georgia I'd seen a lot of chains and we just lifted that one time on the way back; and then we needed a weight to anchor the buoy to the sea bed, and Don got in the car and we went to the public works yard and we found a frigate anchor that had been left there. So we got a fork-lift truck and we got the frigate anchor and took it down and they looked it over for us and they somehow managed to get it out and sink it – all for nothing, it was just done, all from things lying around. The Islanders were interested, they were interested as it was taken there - wonderful, let's do it. It was a great do-it-yourself society, I mean if you had a breakdown, you repaired it; if your generator broke down you didn't ring up an electrician. So it was that sort of place. But my dinghy now, I used it and then passed it on to my

successor who didn't want it, but he passed it on to his, and it's now in the museum, so it's had a good innings.

CC: And you went on the Endurance?

WF: Yes the Endurance was super fun because I was High Commissioner of the British Antarctic Territory which part of it is also disputed by Argentina and Chile, so obviously we wanted to show the flag as part of the duty of Endurance. So we used to go down and take supplies there to the British Antarctic Survey stations down there and do an *acte de presence* and be seen, and fly helicopters and survey, and do all this kind of thing. It was a serious job to do. So I said I want to go down with you and they said of course, and Arlene came too and Don came too because he'd never been down before.

So we went off and that was fine. Endurance was 35 years old then, she had no bow-thrusters in the bow – nowadays you have a propeller which pushes the ship this way or that. None of that. She had a two-stroke engine and if you wanted to go astern you had to stop the engine, pull the great lever down in the engine room, and restart the engine, God willing. Now this was a ship going with icebergs and all this sort of thing all round the place, run by a naval captain who spent his life trying to avoid obstacles in thin-skinned frigates and things. But he was great chap, Tom Sunter, enormous value. So we go off down there, we had a force 9 gale going down which threw you about a bit. But we were alright, we had the Governor's cabin and we were comfortable in there.

We get down there and very soon we get a message that the Biscoe, a British Antarctic Survey ship, is stuck in the ice and could we send a helicopter to see if we could find a passage to get her out. So Arlene and I get in this helicopter and after a brief time in the air we looked for this passage and we find her, and we say you might go over there. On the way back the pilot turns round with a big grin on his face, the Navy like jokes, and he said we can't land because the Endurance has hit an iceberg and she's listing. And we thought this was another Navy joke and weren't bothered, but he was quite serious. So he said we had been told to stay up. So we stayed up for a while and buzzed around, and then the captain flooded the other side of the ship so she was on the level, so we could land and so we then went down and landed. And we put on our once-only suits and things in case she sank. The water was pouring in. When I went down into that part of the ship and it was about this big

(gesture) and I could see gushing water coming in – the pumps were going and all the rest of it. So the captain said we're going to Deception Island 200 miles away where there's a calm area – it's a volcanic island – a calm area with a bay and still water and we'll put the divers down and we'll see how bad it is.

So we did that, and Arlene and I went tracking round the island a bit, and we were given a splendid Royal Marine with a huge backpack to see we didn't fall down a crevasse. Then the divers went down, and said there's nothing we can do about this, it's there. But the pumps are going and we can pack bits and pieces around the hole, but it will still go on leaking. So the captain reports all this to the Admiralty, and we get a message back saying strongly advise return to Falkland Islands, a ship of this age in those temperatures with steel like that, if there's another impact it could just shear all round. The captain said "To hell with that, we're going back down to get on with the job." He sent a lovely telegram saying 'no ice.' The Admiralty replied saying it's your decision, to him. He sent a telegram back saying "Actually I've discovered the best place for ice is in a glass." A nice Naval touch.

So we went back down there and then went on with the job. And Arlene and I were put in a helicopter daily and flown here or there to look at this thing or that, and had a lovely time. I had my 50<sup>th</sup> birthday down there, they produced some venison from reindeer which had been shot in South Georgia – the Navy were full of fun. The BBC rang up just to say 'What's happening down there, could we interview the Governor?' The captain said to me "Look, let's keep it calm we don't want to upset the families back in England". So he did his piece and when it came to me and I said everything's fine. And they said "Well were you afraid, were you alarmed when the ship hit the ice?" "Oh no, didn't turn a hair. They said "Where were you at the time?" "We weren't worried, we were in a helicopter miles away!" The Navy didn't forget that, they played it back to me a number of times! It was huge fun.

Then coming back we went to King George V Island and they sent down a Stena Seaspread which is an all-singing all-dancing North Sea kind of ship with divers on it and proper gear and everything. And they moored alongside her in King George V Sound. They put down divers with hot water running through their suits and riveted a plate on the side. Then we were going to set off with the Stena.

So we did that, and we set off back and a force 9 gale came up and the plate on the side started to flap. So we returned to the bay to wait for a better weather window. And while we were there we got a May Day message from a Peruvian research vessel which was a converted trawler. It had 60 people including an admiral on it, and they were going to set up a base, a research base down in the Antarctic, and they were down there. They had gone aground on a rock. When we looked at the chart there were 'uncharted rocks' and on the R of uncharted, they were. They had taken a short cut, you see. So in the middle of the night with a gale blowing and everything - the sea wasn't too rough because it was a sheltered area but the winds were strong - we set off to help.

So we sent over the Ist Lieutenant and we brought all these 60 people off, they were all pretty miserable of course, especially the captain who had gone aground. We had launches, it wasn't helicopter weather it was all dark. So we took them next day and we landed them at a Chilean base not far away to be taken home. But it was interesting, you see our captain knew we were full of water. The Stena Seaspread, you can imagine, they were standing there with all-singing and dancing and everything, stayed where she was. We went off to the rescue! And when we eventually went with her, side by side back to the Falkland Islands, they repaired Endurance more thoroughly. Now she's gone, scrap, because she's very old. There was a saga then about should there be a new Endurance? It would cost money, could it be called Endurance because there's a tradition you don't call a ship by the same name. Lord Shackleton got heavily involved in that and knew everybody in the Admiralty and the ways of lobbying - and we got a new Endurance. So that was another battle.

It's a fascinating place down there and one lovely thing we did on the way back - we had an artist on board from the Scilly Islands, funnily enough, called John Hamilton, who was painting and he was invited to go along. Anyway you know Shackleton, the whole Shackleton story, and he'd been to Elephant Island where he'd left on his epic journey on a small boat and left all those people there until he came back. So we saw a helicopter getting ready and the captain said "I'm going to fly the artist over Elephant Island and if we can we'll land near the bust of Shackleton." So we said "We're going too, aren't we" and he said "Well, yes OK." A bit of a responsibility, it was about 70 miles away and the weather wasn't very good. So two helicopters went and we sat in the back, and we cleared out everything, we had some sandwiches, the weather was not good. We flew over low enough, we couldn't land, so we flew over and saw the bust of Shackleton on the shore at the place where they

left. Then we went back and the ship was doing (up and down gesture). And the Captain was very relieved.

CC: To have you back again!

WF: Yes, he might have lost the Governor of the Falkland Islands! He was taking a chance and we were very grateful because we enjoyed it. He was great fun, an admirable person.

CC: An adventurer himself.

WF: Oh yes, so many in the Navy are. I remember when we went skiing we had a young naval doctor on board, always prone to chaos and accident. He cut himself very badly when they were doing skiing hiking, and so - a needle and thread on the spot! I remember him forming up to the captain one time, and I overheard him saying "I think you're stressed and you're having a difficult time and ought to do this or that". "Absolute rubbish!" (Laughter).

### **Ambassador to Kuwait, 1992-96**

CC: So when you left the Falklands for Kuwait within two weeks you went from mid-winter to mid-summer, one extreme to another.

WF: Yes, yes. It didn't worry me, because I do things like that. But anyway, and I knew we'd get some leave later. And we went there – and it was a very good time to go, we were very popular because we'd just had the war and they'd been liberated. And you know they have this old tradition of Britain and of British involvement over years, and in 1963 I think it was, when the Iraqis also did a similar thing we sent a carrier out there and stopped them. So they liked us and we had a lot of fun. They have a good sense of humour and they have a lot of contacts, half the Kuwaitis own houses in London anyway, and said 'we feel very at home in London.' So it was a very good atmosphere to be there.

The first thing which confronted us was a huge arms deal, a desert spat. There were two things we were interested in: Challenger tank, and a Warrior personnel carrier. The Americans had the Abrams, I think it was Abrams I or something tank, and a Bradley personnel carrier. And we were fighting about this. We had a big tank outside the Embassy

door, on display. Anyway there was a trial, and we were all flown up to a desert spot and the vehicles did their thing and we were in a tent. I was next to the American Ambassador and the Kuwaiti Chief of Staff, and we had a British General come out. The Challenger tank lumbered round the course, not very well, and then it did some firing not very well, and then its turret swivelled and pointed at us. And I said to the American Ambassador "That's just to make sure that you're awake." It wasn't, it was out of control and fortunately there wasn't anything up the spout, or at least if there was they didn't loose it off!

Anyway that didn't work, the Challenger was rejected, rightly because the American one went zoom, zoom, zoom, zoom – booom! It was much more expensive in fuel and everything which the Challenger wasn't, but you know, the Kuwaitis like something spectacular. However, fortunately the Warrior was much superior to the Bradley, our Warrior GKN. So we had to concede - the Americans also won the jet fighters, we weren't really in that league. But they wanted the personnel carrier too, they wanted the whole deal. And all kinds of dirty tricks were played. They put messages around the Parliament, the press and elsewhere saying the British deal was corrupt, too much commission, the armour plating wasn't good, the price was too high, it didn't do this, it didn't do that, it didn't do the other – dirty play.

CC: Did you play it back again?

WF: The Americans were doing this to us. I wrote a letter to the newspapers, which was given front page coverage in all the newspapers, shooting down all this stuff and saying how wonderful it was; I went round the Parliament calling on all the MPs, saying this that and the other, having cups of tea with them all. And we did everything we had to. With Mrs Thatcher we got more, she wasn't in office but she rang up the Prime Minister, no Crown Prince, and ticked him off, "I don't expect this sort of treatment". I was sitting there, poor Crown Prince, got the handbag! But he was a nice mild man. And I called all the Ministers – we got John Major in the act, everything we could do we pulled in to get this deal. And GKN were working very hard on it. And I would go round at 11 o'clock at night to the Crown Prince with a message. We got a statement from John Major saying there was no corruption and no commission in this deal. So all of this, and it worked, we got the contract, \$1 billion. GKN were very pleased.

CC: Your relationship with the Americans, the Ambassador?

WF: Well, they'd got the rest of the deal. But my wife was very – now she's American, well she's both but she is American - she was very angry with him. Little man, called Skip Gnehm, used to rush round kissing Kuwaitis on both cheeks and tried to be more Kuwaiti than them. Anyway he came out to a party where Arlene also was and he made to kiss her, and she said "I'm not kissing you!" (laughter) But fortunately part of the British kit was made in America, some part of it, and so Lockheed or some other big American corporation, also joined in our battle. But it was touch and go, but we won it in the end, we signed the deal, thank goodness.

CC: That was quite early on in your time?

WF: Yes it was fairly early on, and that was good team. But it was revealing, you know, it was quite a – there was dirty work in the crossroads. I remember going, we used to go in the Parliament anyway, and that was the time of Salman Rushdie, you remember and all that. And I would talk to the Kuwaiti fundamentalists in their short dishdashas and their beards and everything, and say What's your view about that? They were businessmen, they were normal people in most respects, except they were fundamentalists. And we'd have a cup of tea and they'd say "He should be killed." And I'd say the Iranian Government is now no longer demanding that, "It's nothing to do with the Iranian Government, he's blasphemed and according to the law he should be killed. Were he to come into this room now, it would be our duty to kill him." None of these people had ever killed anybody, they wouldn't know how to begin, they were businessmen but they thought they had to say all this stuff. And interestingly enough some of those fundamentalists had degrees in Britain or America in scientific subjects – there was one with a degree in chemistry from Southampton. And a couple of them had married American girls. And they really felt, I think, that they were being swamped by Western culture. And they'd seen you know, some very unattractive things in our country, drunken girls in the middle of the town at night vomiting and all this sort of dreadfulness, and seriously bad TV programmes. They'd been there, they'd seen all that, and a lot of them felt they were being overtaken and swamped by all this. And this, you know, there was nothing you could do about it. Fortunately it was long before Al Quaida and the era of that sort of terrorism, like we have now.

So they said their piece and people did listen or didn't listen, but the Government and the Amir weren't having too much of that. There was a motion to try to get the Shari'a Law introduced but the Amir wouldn't sign that, so that went away. There was a surgeon who had been Edinburgh trained and used to go back to Edinburgh to practise some of the time, married to an English woman. And he said I'm not having any veiled women in my surgery, I'm not having them in the operating theatre, I'm not teaching them. How can you do a medical examination if you've got someone behind a veil or if you are veiled? His house was blown up. And he had to have a guard on it. Well the Government looked after it for they were on his side, but there were those around who would do that. That was a pity. By and large that sort of fanaticism was pretty well below the radar most of the time, which was just as well.

We had lots of visitors – we had the Lord Mayor of London, we had Prince Charles, we had Princess Anne. It was a lovely historic Residence. Peter de la Billière came and launched a book for my drawing room, one of his memoir books. My daughter was there interviewing people for the Kuwait Times, she was a journalist.

CC: Is she still a journalist?

WF: Well she was with Reuters for 16 years and a correspondent in Austria and Mexico, and then she gave that up, much to our dismay because it was a job, and she was married. Then she took a degree, and she'd got an Oxford degree already in French and German, but she took an Art History degree at London, an MA. She'd done quite a lot of articles for the Kuwait Times and other people, and one for the Washington Post when we were in Morocco. And then she got offered, by Thames and Hudson, she'd got to know some of those people and they said "We want to write a book on the Young British Artists - Damien Hirst and all that lot – and we'd commissioned someone but they didn't continue with it so would you like to do it?"

So she said yes and for the last two years she's been doing that and the book has just come out in the bookshops!

CC: Gosh, that's exciting.

WF: It is exciting. She's quite worried about it, you know, it's the first time she's ever written a book and it's all about live artists, you see, and there are about 40 or 50 of them and they're quite a tendentious, volatile bunch and whether they'll like what she's put or not, she's rather worried about it, naturally enough.

CC: Well presumably the editor is happy with it?

WF: The editor has gone through it, but you know the responsibility they like to push back on the author all the time. Anyway, she's launching it on the 26<sup>th</sup>, but it's already in the bookshops now. So we'll see what happens. But she interviewed a lot of people in Kuwait, like David Mellor, and Admirals and Generals, and Rifkind and people like that who came out, and wrote articles about this and that. But she's now doing a lot of articles for Art News in New York, Art in America, and doing reviews and things. But the book has taken up a lot of time, and concern, my goodness! My wife being an art historian has been much involved with advice and help and all that.

CC: You mentioned the Bereaved Families Association in Kuwait.

WF: Yes, and again the message was the same really, one or two of them were (naturally) very sad, you know, a bit 'well it wasn't worth it' and understandably and I don't blame them for that.

CC: The thing is when you join the Army, it's always there isn't it.

WF: It's always there. Yes, it's very sad.

CC: And your wife's book, she wrote it while you were there?

WF: Well it was a collection, called 'Kuwait Arts and Architecture'. The Hungarian Ambassador was a chap called Professor Fehervari – who was British also funnily enough, he came over as a Hungarian refugee in 1956 – and he was an art historian, specialised in objects, the sort of things people collect from Middle East, Oriental. So he and she got together and edited a book, and she wrote an article in it and my daughter also wrote some articles in it, the Professor wrote some articles in it, and they got various 'Leading Lights',

you know, experts on subjects such as weaponry or early days in the Middle East who contributed articles, and it became a very large volume, rather splendid, which the Kuwaitis sent round to various Embassies and things to represent their culture. And we gave one to the Amir and Crown Prince and all that. And so it was a big thing. So that was a great success.

It was fun though, Kuwait, we liked it, the atmosphere was very good and things were reasonable. There was another little attempt by Saddam though, he moved 80,000 soldiers down to the border and there was a flurry, and we flew out a battalion and brought a frigate and the Americans did things. Then the Americans presented the Kuwaitis with a large bill, which they do. And I sent a thing to the Foreign Office saying we're not going to do anything like that, because it's in our national interest to have things stable.

CC: The Kuwaitis aren't that wealthy are they?

WF: Yeah, they're pretty rich. I mean the oil price now is harming them, but then they were pretty rich. So I sent this off and I was asked to ask them to find £5m. So I took it down to the Foreign Ministry and said I'm terribly sorry about this, you have to spend a little bit. They practically fell off their chairs with surprise that it was only £5m! (Laughter)

CC: You mention funerals?

WF: Yes my wife and I used to attend a lot of these, they have funerals and you go and pay your respects and sometimes you go on to where the grave is and you see them being buried – it's very simple, they dig a hole in the sand and shove the chap in it in a shroud. It's nothing like ours, and people mill around in disorder. But we did this for one or two prominent people and the Defence Minister came round to the Embassy one day and said "I wanted to thank you for coming to my mother's funeral". Because he was very impressed as other diplomats didn't, "and we notice that". And also we used to attend any family event like that: you pay your respects, there is a formula - you shake hands and you go round and maybe you go the internment, maybe you don't. And the Diwanias – there was system in Kuwait where all the big families, where the Ministers or the Sabah family or others, would have a sort of congress in the evening they would have a sort of open house and people just wander in and say something and wander out, or sit there for half an hour, coffee or tea would go round and conversation would flow and you'd come for as much as you wanted, and listen

and go away or say something. I used to go to a lot of those, all the time, and that gets noticed because they like you to do that and I would say things and if I had some view to express from the Government, and it was a good chance to say it. And they noticed that because you honoured them by going, taking the trouble, and it was a big part of Kuwaiti life, the Diwaniya. There were two mixed ones in the end, one the Kuwaiti Under Secretary of Education was a member of the Cabinet, a Sabah family member called Rasha, and she had one. I remember taking an Admiral to it. There were two female ones and Arlene would go to those, but otherwise it was a sort of male evening thing and you went round and did that and you went away. But there were some powerful Kuwaiti women, I mean there was a very powerful one in business, and a poet and there was an Under Secretary and there was a Kuwaiti lady Ambassador somewhere. If you had the right background then you could be alright. But it was getting a bit more sad because veils were beginning to appear more. I remember one Kuwaiti woman who practically wore mini-skirts, said to us "You know I'm not sure what is happening because my daughter is getting more, not the veil but a chador, and I don't like this at all." Part of it was because certain Egyptian lecturers had come in to the University and there was a bit of a stir; and part of it was being independent "My mother's not so I'm going to wear something different!" There were all these strands but it was all getting a bit more onerous and there was a motion put forward in Parliament - and the Rector of the University was a woman at the time. Good family of course, but a woman. And they were starting to say it shouldn't be and there shouldn't be mixed classes. I don't think they won the day, but it was beginning to get around it, just beginning to come round. I'm not sure what's happening now, I should get myself up to date on that.

CC: You had a Heads of Mission Conference?

WF: Yes we had a big Heads of Mission Conference, a worrying business, and we'd only just got there, but everybody came, it worked thank goodness. We managed to put on local music and dance or something at the end of it to cheer everybody up.

CC: Did they have them back in London at that time, I can't remember if that had started?

WF: No, we never went to one in London. We did have a society set up for the Kuwait-British families. We had a Society set up to look after them, I was a Patron and a rich Kuwaiti was a Patron, he was Speaker of the House of Parliament. The Kuwaitis are very

generous and they did pay a lot of money to get these people to come out, did things and got things organised for them back in England. And there was a service arranged at St. Paul's with the Queen attending and a lot of Kuwaitis flew over and were there for that, and the families were there. So that helped, the Kuwaitis did show gratitude, and thank goodness for that.

### **Ambassador to Morocco, 1996-99**

CC: And then of course you were moved to Morocco and concurrently Mauritania, as Ambassador from 1996 to 1999, before you retired.

WF: Coming up to the final gallop.

CC: Was it a good place to finish in?

WF: Yes it was good, it was good, but it wasn't as important as Kuwait, of course, because the British interest was much less. Kuwait was very important, with close links. Morocco was French, of course, basically. But you know, it was a question of what to do in my last three years and I certainly didn't want to go back to London very much. They said we could stay in Kuwait, which we didn't mind because we were so happy there, but it might not last for three years and we might have to bring you out before two, and early retirement and all that. Sri Lanka came up but I said I've been to Sri Lanka – a charming place, but, nothing to do with me. Then I competed for Morocco and I got it fortunately. They always said you shouldn't lobby for a post, but I went round lobbying like Billy-oh and we got it! (Laughter). I certainly did! I certainly did! And we got it!

It was interesting because the Moroccans at the time, they were very much involved with France obviously and there were 20,000 French people living there. But the Moroccans wanted something extra. And we were on this position; they knew about the Americans, it was a vast country and so on, but we were European, and they thought we would be a good possibility to have another string to their bow. And I thought so but could I get the British Government to be interested? Could I hell! Also there was another occasion – they had a chap called Youssoufi who was a very distinguished old socialist Moroccan. He knew all the European old Socialists, like Soares of Portugal and those sort of people. He was a genuine,

honest, old-type socialist, he'd been in exile and I'm not sure he hadn't been in prison in Morocco for a bit, and a really nice, good man. He was out in limbo because there wasn't much democracy and the democratic scene wasn't much, and my No.2 said why don't we go and woo this man because things might change. It was his idea and I said, yes let's do it. So we went round and this old chap gave us a cup of tea in his little office and we chatted and we invited him to England. And it was at the time of the British election so he was there to see that, and it was good. And he was enormously grateful because he was out of office and we'd looked out for him. Not very long after that the King decided to have a bit more democracy and Youssoufi became Prime Minister. And he never forgot us. He was always very welcoming and if I wanted a Minister to see him, I got him. Dawn Primarolo came out once – do you remember that name, she was Secretary at the Treasury or something. She as another young, trendy - didn't know how to deal with an Ambassador, she was rather embarrassed, you know rather funny old fuddy-duddy Ambassadors are - one of those. And anyway we took her to Tangier for something or other, and we were staying in the same hotel as the Prime Minister. So I rang up his office and I said I've got this lady, Dawn Primarolo, a not very important, (but I didn't say that), junior member of the Government, would the Prime Minister be so kind as to receive her? Of course, of course Ambassador, bring her up! So Primarolo was rather excited and rather thrilled as she didn't expect it.

CC: Did she realise how lucky she was?

WF: Yes I think she did in the end, yes, but she hadn't expected that, a junior Minister to see the Prime Minister! But she did and we sat down and had a nice chat.

CC: Big brownie point.

WF: Yes, that was good.

Anyway, he was very nice and so we got on very well in that respect, but to return to the point, you see, I thought Blair who was around, I thought we've got a Labour crowd, this is a socialist government, it's a genuine new attempt at some form of more democracy by the King which is remarkable, surely we ought to pay attention to Youssoufi, we ought to have some senior British Minister come out, it doesn't need to be long, a day, two days – I couldn't get anywhere. I got Angela Eagle, she's now around front bench, Aid or Foreign

Affairs or something; she came out having just outed herself as a lesbian. Talk about senior people - she was a junior something or other, Parliamentary Under Sec for something, nice enough, I have nothing against Angela Eagle, but it wasn't the weight that we needed. I took her to see various people, but she again you know, they were all a bit worried about - the King was a ruthless king, he was a serious king, no nonsense there, everyone was frightened to death of him, 'Ah, Sa Majesté', and he had a number two the Minister of the Interior who was a very formidable character was very powerful, his hatchet man, really. And these Labour people they didn't know whether they ought to be seen with these people but if you're going to be here, I mean you're going to meet the second most powerful man in the country. So we took them along and they were received and so on and that was alright, but they weren't very keen.

CC: They were thinking of their position at home.

WF: Yeah, and it was very funny because at the end of their time with this Minister he went to show us out but he got the wrong door and he showed us into a broom cupboard!

(Laughter)

CC: How do they get out of things like that? I mean do they laugh?

WF: Yes, yes – "Oh dear my mistake, so sorry, it's over here" A very powerful man, but you know, sinister.

So anyway, I've nothing against Angela Eagle, you know they were alright, but the point was I was really hoping for some heavies. And why not?! We had 56 companies in Morocco, they were either British or British-Moroccan or Moroccan dealing with Britain. 56! Textiles used to come by lorry from Manchester, be made into trousers and go by lorry all the way back from Casablanca for Marks & Spencer or BHS. All that, and this was a British interest.

CC: Was this because they had taken foreign affairs into No.10, or was it the Foreign Office approach as well?

WF: I suppose it was, well I think it was probably more Blair I think, Blair thought he was really rather grand didn't he, so I think he probably thought "Morocco? Where's that? No time for that. America or whatever it is, we've got to have a war going in Iraq, it's much more important!" That was a pity, I thought.

The King did have this religious significance. He had a title Commander of the Faithful which was a significant learned title, so it helped him and probably still does in terms of his limiting extremists, treating him with a bit more care than they might otherwise. We had numerous British people in prison for drugs, of course. Sometimes they were set up, quite obviously, some Moroccan wanting to curry favour with the authorities, or do a bit of dealing, or someone in authority himself would hand them a person to put in prison and say "Look what a good boy am I, I've shown up this young person who was doing drugs"- he'd probably sold them to him himself. But not all the Moroccans are a bit mixed on that. Some of them are seriously anti-drugs, some of them were a little bit in it.

CC: Too much money.

WF: Yes. We had a customs officer from HM Customs, in the Embassy sort of liaising and doing things, so we saw what he was doing. He was a nice chap, I enjoyed that

CC: Role of your wife – she got an MBE?

WF: Well it was a collection of things, I mean it was in Kuwait with the Somalis and all sorts of things she'd done. And also frankly people would come to my house because of her. I mean the Head of the Secret Service didn't go to people's houses, but my wife knew his wife and he came. So you know, she was invaluable at that. She had a very good touch.

CC: Very nice that that was recognised.

WF: Oh yes, she got on very well with Arabs and Moroccans, she somehow had the touch, they liked her, a lot. She actually was Jewish but was at home anywhere in the Arab world, all round the Arab world. She didn't make a point of it but they knew, they looked up and the name would give it away and that sort of thing it never impinged at all, in any way. And in Kuwait they certainly knew, but they weren't bothered.

CC: What was the citation as such?

WF: I think it was for works generally in various posts around the place, for helping the British interest, which she did, very definitely. So that was good.

CC: Yes very, and actually Chris Wilton, one of your successors in Kuwait, his wife also got recognised.

WF: Oh yes, I know him, I knew his father too.

Morocco was fun and again we'd travel, we had wonderful travels around the place, and we had a dog which gave birth to nine puppies. We had a great time there, Tangier and everywhere else. But professionally it was a little frustrating, from that point of view we could have achieved much more. We had to speak French of course which was a bit of a strain as it was a bit arcane.

CC: You read Arabic at Cambridge of course, but that was a long time ago.

WF: Yes indeed! But Arabic was a bit dodgy - educated Moroccans can speak classical Arabic of course and all the newspapers were in classical Arabic, but when they're speaking to each other - Wow, a different matter. But it was fun to do it and we had an EU gang there as usual and the French Ambassador invariably as in Kuwait, said we all had to speak in French. And the Scandinavians said we're not going to speak French, we don't speak French we speak English. So Finland, Norway, Sweden weren't having any of that. That was fun. We had a Swedish Ambassador, a lady, who being Swedish was left-wing and trendy and severe and politically correct and all that sort of thing. And I remember we were sitting there at the table once and somebody said something about an illegitimate child. "There's no such thing as an illegitimate child, you cannot use a term like that! Because it's not the child's fault. No such thing!" So we all said so sorry, we'll call it something else. Anyway I went up to Tangier where we had a Consul called Stephanie Sweet and I said "Stephanie, do you know there's no such thing as an illegitimate child?" And she said "There bloody well is, I've got one!" And she did, she was a single mum. (Laughter)

CC: So how much time did you spend in Mauritania?

WF: As much as I could, I thought it was a fabulous country. There wasn't much business there but we went down by air first time. After that I thought that's dull so if we could get the Navy involved because sometimes they were passing by on their way to South Africa or somewhere like that.

So we got HMS Newcastle I think it was, and we picked her up at Agadir, myself and my wife, and we went down a two or three day cruise, very nice, and of course the Mauritians were thrilled because people didn't bother to bring their ships down very much and we had a cocktail party on board and all the usual stuff, and that went down well, it was very well received.

It's a desert country, 70% desert, they all wore togas, and being nomads again they were a certain amount pleased with themselves, they were quite proud. We had a Consul, an Honorary Consul called Nancy Abeid ar Rahman who had been married to a Mauritanian Minister and divorced and had two or three children, and she was down there. She had a dairy for camel milk, and she had this business which was fair enough because she spoke happily French, and English obviously, and Hassaniyah Arabic, local Arabic, so she was very good. And she managed to get by in a very traditional Mauritanian gear, draw her paths carefully and she knew all that there was to know and everybody. She was respected very widely as a woman, there was no problem down there.

The Mauritians were quite fun, we enjoyed them. And later on I thought, we're going to do the ship thing again because up in Nouadhibou, which is an iron ore port – the one thing Mauritians have got is iron ore, big deposits of iron ore well inside, hundreds of miles inland. I think Antoine de St. Exupéry flew over it and found his compasses all going wrong because of the iron and the magnetism in the ore. Anyway, that's neither here nor there.

So they had this iron ore and Britain bought some of it, 6% or something, and so there was that. And Nouadhibou itself was nothing. The railway came in there and a 2km long train full of iron ore, and there was a jetty and iron ore ships would be there, otherwise it was a small nowhere place. And the harbour was fairly full of broken down trawlers and rotting hulks – a bit dodgy and the charts weren't that good.

Anyway, we found out that the Commonwealth War Graves said there was an air crash in WWII with seven British airmen on board off Mauritania and they never had a proper grave and we would like to see if we could do that. We are going to have some headstones made and could you help us to install them? I think the stones were made in Italy for some reason. So we got HMS Cornwall and she went there and she got the stones and I tee'd it all up with the Mauritians.

And funnily enough in this totally Muslim country, there was a Catholic priest in a funny little igloo-like church in Nouadhibou. I don't know what sort of flock he had, probably 1 ½ people, but anyway he was there. So we chatted to him. And Arlene and I arranged with HMS Cornwall to get the gravestones and then they would go to the Canary Islands and Arlene and I flew up to Canary Islands, my daughter flew to the Canary Islands and we all got on board HMS Cornwall. Wonderful. Four day cruise down to Nouadhibou. Wonderful, and with my daughter on board, refuelling at sea, exercises, helicopter from the ship. Wonderful.

So we get to Nouadhibou and we are approaching and there's a 30 mile onshore wind full of sand. The young navigating officer sidled up to the Captain on the bridge where we were all standing, and said, "Sir I advise you not to enter this harbour. The charts are unreliable and there are wrecks and there's a wind blowing." "Thank you very much Navigator". Straight on. The pilot comes up to him, I don't know where we got a pilot from, I think a Mauritanian pilot, and says "You are going rather fast Captain." "I know how to stop the ship when I need to. Thank you very much" Straight in. Wonderful piece of seamanship. Drops the kedge anchor here, the wind takes him neatly along to the jetty. Beautiful. First class. So that goes very well. Then we do the ceremony, the classic piece with the Navy and we have this gravestone set up, classic churchyard, all perfectly done.

Then the Mauritanian Navy gives a big mutton-grab for our ship. Huge tent, and there's not a woman to be seen. Except there's a singer lady, a Mauritanian, a very raucous lady singer, she was produced. And there we are the Navy and the Mauritanian Navy, sitting round on the floor on cushions and things, and we're all there. The mutton-grab is provided and we all eat away, the singer sings; and after a while the music goes on, the Mauritanian sailors get up to dance. And they bring a British sailor to dance with them. And they do! They're all

going like this (clapping) to Mauritanian music, and none of them had had a drop to drink. It was a huge success. Then there were some speeches by me and everybody else.

And you know the Captain said afterwards “That was fun, they enjoyed it, they were totally amazed to enjoy it without a beer or anything.” But it was so different, and the food was good and it was novel and it was taken in that spirit, so they really liked it.

CC: They weren't made to feel stupid.

WF: No, good old Jack Tar, good for him, he did it.

CC: What fun.

WF: It was fun, very good fun.

CC: And a lovely thing to be able to do.

WF: Yes it was, it was. Anyway, so we did that and then we went on the train overnight, it was nice because in the distance, you know in the Western Sahara problem, there's trouble round there, competing for territory and oil. The Algerians are backing the Western Saharans and the Moroccans are against them. And it's going nowhere. You could see the camp fires of the Sahrawis behind the frontier in the dark, and the railway going along beside them. We were very well received in these huge iron works and given a nice meal and so on. We did arrange some desert training with the Mauritians.

They had a navy, we were given a naval officer to go around the desert with, and we spent a lot of time driving around and they put two or three goats in the back and then at night they would kill a goat and we would have it for supper, and the Mauritanian soldiers and sailors would cook it. We had the DA's wife with us and a young girl from the Embassy and my wife. And the DA's wife was very worried about this because she was sorry for the goats in the back, and she would feed them. And the Mauritians would say “Why is she feeding our dinner?” And then they severed the head of this goat and put the severed head in the back of the truck along with the live goats, who didn't seem to get the message. So we went several days doing this, camping out in the desert, and you didn't need a tent or anything, it

was just dry dunes and nomads and watering holes and camels. That's what I joined the Foreign Office for.

CC: How lovely, actually, that your last posting could be like that.

WF: It was good, it was good. When I went to say goodbye to the President who was a Colonel, it wasn't a dictatorship - it wasn't a democracy but it was OK, you know it wasn't brutal, it wasn't anything like that. The editor of a journal, a very prominent Mauritanian, very brilliant, probably been in prison briefly, but then the President had invited him to go on a journey with him in the desert.

There was talk of slavery and the Americans loved to think there were slaves, and there was a big rumpus; at one point Congress was going to cut off aid because of slavery. There probably were some in a sense, hard to tell. They found one slave – they thought – and they sent over journalists to look into it, and they found her there closeted in front of a television, married with three children.

Of course you can't be 'for' slavery in any sense, but in a way that society, if you hadn't got much money or much background or anything else, then you were taken into a family as a quote 'slave', but you weren't brutalised in any way and you were fed and watered and eventually you got married. It was better than being on the street. So people justified it, as I say it wasn't slavery in the sense we think of, well yes maybe, but it wasn't quite the same thing. But the Americans rather lost face anyway because they tried to find one, a real one, and they couldn't do it.

I went to say goodbye to the President and I spoke to him in MECAS Arabic, and I said "Can you understand my Arabic?" and he said "Yes very well." And then we switched into French – and I was told afterwards that he had very little Arabic and was longing to speak French! (laughter)

CC: He didn't want to be shown up!

WF: No!

WF: There was the Kuwaiti State Visit, I think we missed that.

There was going to be a State Visit for the Amir of Kuwait during our time, of course it's a very good thing to have a Head of State, and the Amir was very happy. So obviously all the preparations went on - what did he like, what did he like to eat and didn't, and so on. I was going to be in the suite, there were four, with him.

So it all goes beautifully and he flies in to Gatwick in his big jumbo jet and the Prince of Wales is there. The Prince of Wales and I and the Ambassador and the Amir, and we ride up in the compartment in the Royal Train, rather fun, and various jokes are banded about by Prince Charles about the FCO. We get there and they take us to Horse Guards where the Queen and her Ministers are on the dais and she introduces the Amir to them. The Amir inspects the Guard of Honour with the Duke, and we get in our carriages and go along jog, jog, jog, and all that, which is rather nice.

And then there's lunch. And this lunch in Buckingham Palace is a sort of informal, family lunch the first day. So I found myself sitting here (gestures) and the Queen there and Duchess of Grafton and the interpreter, and the Prince's Private Secretary here, Kuwaiti, Kuwaiti and so on. And the Queen is talking telling him about her recent visit to Russia. I also have to talk to the Duchess who's here, and the Private Secretary who was married to Diana's sister, wasn't he!

The visit was a huge success. The Kuwaitis were touched, you know I was told that the Queen rang up the Amir's room as one would to a guest, and said "Have you got everything you want?", and this kind of thing. And I saw the Duke in a passage when the Amir was getting a GCVO, and he was struggling to put it on, so the Duke said "Here let me help you with that". These family touches. And the Kuwaitis noticed that, they noticed the family atmosphere and all that. And the whole pageantry thing was beautifully done, it all went very well. He (the Amir) saw Mr Major. Mr Major was nice. I sat on Mr Major's right, the two of us opposite the Amir and advisers in the Cabinet Room. Mr Major said to me "Do say if there's anything you want to add, but not if you don't want to." It was all a success and the Kuwaitis liked that, they like Royalty.

CC: Goodness. Well that's quite a tale.

WF: Well a lot of it's rather diversionary I think.

CC: It was absolutely fascinating and there's a lot there. Thank you very much for giving it so much thought.

WF: Well I hope it wasn't too long.