

BDOHP Interview Index and Biographical Details

Richard Fyjis-Walker, CMG 1980; CVO 1976

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BRITISH DIPLOMATIC ORAL HISTORY PROGRAMME

RECOLLECTIONS OF RICHARD (DICK) FYJIS-WALKER CMG CVO

RECORDED AND TRANSCRIBED BY ABBEY WRIGHT, SEPTEMBER 2013.

AW: This is Abbey Wright on 2 September recording the recollections of Richard (Dick) Fyjis-Walker. So Dick, let's go back to the beginning, you joined the Foreign Office in 1954, what decided you to do that?

RFW: I joined rather late because I had tried when I left university. I'd gone in for the Foreign Office exam. I'd become top of the ones who were rejected, hadn't got in, and had always basically wanted simply to be paid to live abroad. I wasn't trying to be really patriotic or save the country or anything like that. I'd always wanted to live abroad and was interested in history. Failed the exam, went into the City of London for four years and had always dreamt of the Foreign Office, a little like Oscar Wilde in Reading Jail who saw the little speck of blue and suddenly saw an advertisement for "over age entrants" which I took and despite a hiccup at the final interview, got in.

AW: And did you find the process better the second time round?

RFW: Yes, partly because I knew by then that if you put the right things down on the form you could always get the question asked that you wanted to be asked. It nearly fell short because during my final interview an old white faced gentleman was asking me about social anthropology, which was one of my things, and I mentioned Evans-Pritchard. The old chap woke up and said: "Evans-Pritchard, Evans-Pritchard, damned fella, always mucking about with my tribes". He had been a Governor in the South of Sudan and Evans-Pritchard had gone and asked the tribesmen personal questions and they got angry, had a riot, the Governor had to put in his troops to put it down. So he, the Governor, hated Evans-Pritchard and I was extolling him, Evans-Pritchard. I was quite lucky to get away with that actually! Anyway they let me in.

AW: And did you go straight off to MECAS (Middle East Centre for Arabic Studies) in Beirut or did you start in King Charles Street?

RFW: Almost straight off. I think I did a short spell in the Middle East Department, but really quite short. And they just press-ganged me and said: “You go and learn Arabic, you go to MECAS”, and so I went.

AW: And that must have been the most amazing experience? There are legends about MECAS?

RFW: Oh it was, the spy school! Very funny in lots of ways. It was at a time when the Gulf money was just beginning and the Saudis. MECAS is half way up a mountain, and half way up that half way there were a lot of hotels. You could see Saudi Sheiks with enormous long motorcars carrying petrol cans full of Maria Theresa dollars which were still the absolute currency there. Beirut was great. I met Philby there, he was there, then being respectable.

The school was run when I was there, on a fairly amateur basis by a man called Alan Trott. Alan Trott hated the Foreign Office, hated Arabic, because he had been the Office’s leading Persian speaker. There was a thing called “Trott’s trot” in 1948. Alan Trott went bird-watching in the Bakhtiari country, which was where the Shah’s wife Soraya came from. Of course nobody believed he was bird-watching, he was raising the tribes! Ernie Bevin had to get up in the House of Commons! He was really charming, an enchanting eccentric. He hated the Foreign Office. He was A C Trott actually. One day he got a letter from the Foreign Office saying: “C A Trott Esq”, and he wrote on it “Not known, A C Trott” and sent it back unopened!

Those were the days when eccentrics like him could somehow be found places. Have you heard of the phrase “the dead four”? Well “the dead four” was a Personnel Department phrase. When people were not going to go any further than Grade four, which was Counsellor, they couldn’t retire you, or they didn’t want to retire you. All over the world there were tiny little posts that were known as the posts of the dead fours! But now of course you can’t do that. So the eccentrics had been useful in a country which they’d known a lot about but weren’t material for ambassadorial posts and so on, could go to these places with honour, without shame, and spend their time until retirement. But that’s gone. So the Foreign Office was actually a very nice, gentlemanly, place when I went into it. You felt that you would be fairly dealt with, that you would go as far as you deserved to go on the whole. Elbows weren’t out. I think they are much more today. They were out, of course, from time to time, but they weren’t out as now.

And the “Third Rooms” were in the Foreign Office in those days. The Deputy Under Secretary, one of the great Moscow men, was Deputy Under Secretary when I was there and he’d come to tea in the Third Room and chat. There was a real circulation of personality and ideas and you’d talk about what you’d been doing and what you would put up to him and so on. So it was a very nice collegiate atmosphere.

AW: And back at MECAS, how many were you in a group?

RFW: There were three from the Foreign Office, Branch A it was called. There was me, there was James Adams who ended up as Ambassador in Cairo and Michael Edes, he went to Yemen. The course was divided into two. You did a year and took the second class exam, did another six months in theory, to take the first class. It was the first senior course of the Foreign Office where none of three got through to the first course! There were two or three commercial people, two or three foreigners, a Canadian who was brilliant. There were a couple of naval officers and a couple of army officers, one called Dickie Lawson who ended up I think as Lt General. One or two other soldiers, it was a sort of mix.

The teaching staff was run by Norman Lewis who was an ex oilman but a very good Arabist, though not a brilliant teacher. It was a rather nice lazy sort of thing and you had a month off when you went off to live in an Arab country. I went down to Jordan, I spent a couple of weeks with a Bedouin tribe in a tent. I learnt a very curious sort of Arabic there! Had to sleep in a tent and had one of those flippers of dust against bugs but hardly dared use it because of the noise it made, so I got very eaten. But it was great. I was down outside Bethlehem and I stayed in Bethlehem for a time.

Beirut had, of course, the greatest night life, the best clubs in the world! Elephant Noir sticks in the mind! Patent leather walls, totties and everything! The St George Hotel was the centre of the journalists, spies, and everybody else and where Philby came quite often, and Patrick Seale, and lots of people. There was always lots of gossip in the bar of the St George, it was the major thing. There was a wonderful chap called Slade Baker who was an ex Brigadier and Middle East Correspondent for the Daily Telegraph. He couldn’t write a word but would sit in the bar and wait until the journalists came in at the end of the evening and say “I say, old boy, would you just take a look at this?” It was a different world to today.

Later they tried to send me back to Beirut, but I refused to go for family reasons, but that was the worst time of the war in Beirut. So they made me stay in Khartoum instead which was OK by me!

AW: So it was a happy year at MECAS?

RFW: Yes, very happy. Some travel, into Syria because you could just drive up the road into Syria. The nightlife, the English expatriate professors and so on. There was a cultural English group who were mad keen Arabists. Everybody was very interested in the Arab world and one became more and more interested and that, actually, was what Norman Lewis was good at. He wasn't very good as a language teacher but he was good on the Middle East because he'd worked as an oilman. Then when he and Trott got too inefficient, the Foreign Office suddenly decided they had to brace it up and so they sent Donald Maitland to run it, who was a very good Arabist anyway, and James Craig who at that time came from Durham University as a lecturer to be Chief Instructor at MECAS, and he became the Arabist guru. He was so determined on the Arab world that he tried to make it a condition of joining the Foreign Office, that they would never send him to any other part. Then it all became very serious, with word lists ...

AW: So the Maitland era was after your time?

RFW: No, it was half way through it, and that did make it much more effective as a training ground for Arabists. It was very funny, it was quite a shock! Word lists! Yes, MECAS was a good background for the Middle East irrespective of whether you became a really good Arabist or not. It was very nice in that Arabic is a very strong, rich language, difficult. I'm a very bad linguist, but if I use now a different phrase it's very often Arabic based, the rhythms of the language stick in one's mind.

AW: So from MECAS you were posted to Amman?

RFW: Yes, I went then to Amman.

Amman, 1956

AW: And how was that on arrival?

RFW: Well that on arrival was enormous! I got into one of the two hotels, came out to a vast cheering crowd! I thought "Not for me, surely not!" They were shouting away, I couldn't

quite make out what they were shouting. I got to the Embassy and discovered that it was the night when Glubb had been put on an aeroplane and flown out of the country. So, of course, the Embassy was in absolute turmoil. The poor old Ambassador, called Charles Duke, had not expected it, although Glubb himself had said "You cannot have an Arab army commanded by an English colonial officer any longer". Big pressure was building up on King Hussein from his army, by which time they had some very competent officers, they'd all been trained at Sandhurst. The actual Legion and its Camel Corps were very good. But the timing, the King obviously had to keep it secret, was unexpected. So from then on there was considerable confusion in the Embassy and in the country. At one stage there was a half-hearted attack on the Embassy. Some stone staircases came up to the Embassy and the military attaché and I were despatched to stand on top of one of these staircases and confront the mob! They were a fairly happy mob but the attaché had a pistol which he sort of waved and we all shouted "Go away"! And on the roof they were burning the documents - in those days to destroy documents, you burnt them. That was two or three months after I got there during which time there were some very agitated worries about was the country turning anti-British. Of course we wanted King Hussein to have a friendly regime, etc etc. So all the work in essence was devoted to that and we had a very gung-ho New Zealand number two called Heath Mason. Heath Mason persuaded the Office to buy him a semi racing sports car so that he could go semi motor racing with King Hussein who loved cars! Masses of conversations about what plots were going on, which we were observing. There were I think two attempted coups on Hussein when I was there by his own generals who had succeeded Glubb, who had been put in by Hussein. One was called Ali Abu Nowar. Hussein's Bedouin people rumbled both of these. He was very generous. He didn't cut their heads off or anything. He simply retired them and sent them away. One of them was a pretty nasty guy I seem to remember. But how did you keep in touch with all the movements going on in Jordan at the time? But then it calmed down, it was very nice. I managed to do quite a lot of travel in Jordan, down to Aqabah and Wadi Rum, Lawrence of Arabia on camel back going up the Wadi Rum, that sort of thing! Jerash, the Roman ruins, there's a lot to see in Jordan, and down to the Red Sea.

At that time there was a thing called "The Dead Sea Fleet". On the Dead Sea there was a sort of motor boat, run by an English naval officer and a crew of, say six. The only thing was that it sort of sank, but it couldn't sink! There was a leak from its starting engine and an electrical spark went down to the copper bottom of the boat which with the spark, the copper

and the acids in the Dead Sea reacted, so there were holes, so the boat almost sank. But because it was the Dead Sea, it couldn't sink! It was absolutely hilarious!

AW: What was its function? What was it there for?

RFW: Well the West Bank was then of course Jordanian and its function, in theory, was to guard that. But that was the great thing, you could go to half of Jerusalem from Jordan and we had a Consul in Jerusalem whose main job actually was to strut around the Holy Sepulchre once a year in front of the Ethiopians. The Imperial Power led the religious representatives inside the Holy Sepulchre once a year with a stick! And so there was lots of potential friction there at the Allenby Gate.

But it was very nice being there at that time and one could go down the Jordan to Madaba, a place where there is a lovely mosaic of a fish swimming down the Jordan, getting to where the Jordan runs into the sea, turning round, because the sea was full of salt and it didn't like the salt. So there is a beautiful Roman mosaic of this at Madaba.

When I was in Jordan there was a man, who was Freya Stark's ex husband, Stewart Perowne. I remember being in a post office with this chap, he was trying to send a birthday telegram congratulations to King Hassan [*? Hussein*] and the poor Palestinian postboy behind the counter couldn't take it on! Perowne was throwing a great sort of gay tempest "Of course my dear Hassan"! [*? Hussein*] He had been Freya Stark's husband for a short time and had been an academic.

So that was all fine until Suez. As it happened I was due to come out of Jordan on leave. War clouds were gathering. One didn't know, of course, quite what was happening. In fact I came out on the last BOAC plane from Amman to London before Suez happened. And that then led into my Suez escapade.

AW: So that was the end of your posting in Amman?

RFW: I didn't go back. I came back to London and was woken up early one evening. I was in Essex with my first wife's family. It was six or seven o'clock in the evening and there was a voice on the telephone "This is the Foreign Office, you are to go to Lyneham by seven o'clock and take a plane". No questions and nothing more was said. So my then wife borrowed her parents' car, a thing called an Austin Princess. So we drive across and get to Lyneham by about five in the morning. Saluting guards at the camp gate say "This way Sir"

and in we go. An Air Force officer arrives saying “Your plane is over here Sir, you can drive to the stairway” so my wife drives us to the plane and there are two more saluting guys. I trot up the stairs and another guy salutes and says “Can we send the Princess away Sir?” So the Princess, my wife’s car goes off! I go into a huge aeroplane, a troop carrying plane, totally empty and underneath every seat is a sort of lunch box. More saluting and “Can we take off Sir?” “Yes, why not”. I have absolutely no idea where I’m going, none whatsoever. After about an hour, an hour and a half, somebody comes back from the cockpit and says “Will you come up to the cockpit Sir”. So I go up to the cockpit and the Captain says “Now we can open our orders”. And he’s got an envelope. He opens the orders, we’re over Gibraltar at this point, and the orders tell him to turn left for Cyprus and so we turn left for Cyprus and we land at Akrotiri. At Akrotiri, I get out of the aeroplane and there on the tarmac is Donald Maitland, in a bowler hat with an umbrella, Patrick Wright and a chap called Philip Maconie, who I think is still alive, and a tiny little aeroplane with a propeller. Again a saluting chap says “Your aeroplane Sir” to the four of us. So we all pile into this tiny little plane, a chap slings the propeller, the chap shouts “Chocks away”, it was that small, and off we go.

Donald Maitland knows what is going on but none of the others do. I’m not sure I think Patrick was actually working at the Foreign Office at the time but Philip Maconie had come from somewhere else. We take off. Suddenly the pilot says “I’m having trouble with the wires, they can’t turn”. We all look down and there is Donald Maitland’s umbrella and its handle has got involved with those wires that go back to the tail! We get that straightened out and get to the camp just outside Limassol.

Donald Maitland then explains to us that what we are doing is taking over the BBC radio station. The BBC had previously set up what was supposed to be an independent radio station with programmes for the Middle East called Voice of the Arabs. It had become an extremely well respected source of information in the Middle East. But at Suez, the Arab staff and the English director, a man called Posnet, had all downed tools and walked off. By the time we got there the invasion had started. They had all walked off, the chronology is a bit difficult, but I think the declaration must have been made while I was in the aeroplane. I don’t think that I knew we were doing Suez when I was put on the aeroplane. So here was the major British radio station in the Middle East with two huge transmitters, masts, studios, abandoned by the staff. They had left behind, luckily, two English engineers and two English correspondents one of whom was Dick Beeston. Dick was Daily Telegraph correspondent finally in Washington, and his son is the Times’s Richard Beeston. We were told we had to

be on the air, ready to broadcast to Egypt and the Middle East within 24 hours! I must say it was quite hairy.

The way it worked was that London sent us recorded radio tapes of the messages we were to broadcast and we were to fill in with material taken from a huge library of discs. It was in the days when you worked off these big wheel things. And we had a platoon of Royal Engineers on the grounds that engineers knew about radios. But of course the radios they knew about were the ones you carry on your back!

Philip Maconie, Patrick Wright and Donald were all very good Arabists. I was an absolute rotten Arabist so I was put in charge of inventing systems to make this work. What we did in the end was that we rifled through the library which was archival and very good. It had all the right prayers for the different times of the day so you could construct an Arabic programme of prayers, library material programmes, music and so on, and then you had your news bulletins to put in and you could construct a 24 hour system. We got these great tapes and listened to them a bit and put pieces of paper where they began and ended and gave them to the soldiers to put on these vast machines "Put them on at this point, take them off at that point". The English engineers kept the masts and the transmitters working. They were British engineers who had been with the station and so they knew it and didn't have a political bias, they were just engineers who'd been told to run the station and they ran it, full stop. They were very, very good.

And so that was the way we worked and we got these messages from London which were all propaganda directed at the Egyptian people and the Egyptian army because the invasion was going on. There was one which we simply refused to broadcast. This may be a slight exaggeration, but basically it arrived and said "You've seen what our powers can do by day, wait till you see what they can do by night". This sent Donald Maitland, needless to say, up the wall and we simply refused to do that. But most of the rest was reasonably alright as propaganda and so on.

There were two terrible moments. One was when we took out a prayer section and hadn't bothered to listen to it in full. But it was the right prayer, for the right day at the right time. The only thing was that in the middle of this broadcast there was a terrible quooossh noise! We discovered that the Imam who recorded this prayer had come back drunk and been sick over the microphone and so the insult ... In the middle of this prayer, suddenly this terrible noise! The other was when two soldiers playing the tapes found a song they knew which

they put on because they liked it, which was “The Oranges of Jaffa”! So that didn’t go down awfully well.

We messed with the army. The station was down at the bottom of a hill and you went up, and there was an army mess. The regiment was up there. We had to go and eat up there. We slept in our own huts, because it was 24 hour broadcast. We had huts in the station and there were loudspeakers in every hut, so we slept with the programmes always going on and that was how we heard the Oranges of Jaffa! The army was extremely sniffy when we went up to have meals. “Who were these people, these awful Foreign Office civilians?”

Unbelievably sniffy. But Donald Maitland had a friend in headquarters who was a Brigadier. Headquarters were down in Limassol. So we hatched up a plot that worked perfectly. Every Sunday there was a mess lunch and we got the Brigadier to ring up the colonel and say he’d like to be asked to lunch. The plan then was that the Brigadier would call Donald “Sir”.

Donald would call the Brigadier “Mike”. We in normal Foreign Office terms would all call Donald “Donald” and he would call us “Dick” and “Philip” and so on. So at the lunch there was the Brigadier saying “Sir” to Donald who was only this high (*RFW gestures a short man*), and this little civilian whom they, the regiment, had hardly passed the butter to, calling the Brigadier by his Christian name, and Donald being called “Sir” and we were all calling Donald “Donald”. So “Who were these people?” It was very funny. It changed the whole thing!

Limassol at that time was of course all Eoka. We had occasionally to go down to Limassol and we were given a pistol because there had been several British soldiers killed. We had to go and see Bernard Fergusson who was the Commanding General down there. We had to go, particularly on the propaganda side, to talk to him about the content of the stuff coming from London and what we were going to suggest to London. That was one of the moments of the “You’ve seen what our powers are doing by day” and so on. It was quite a curious episode for a Foreign Service officer!

AW: How long did it last?

RFW: I’m actually just trying to remember. I’m trying to remember how long Suez lasted because it actually lasted longer than you think before the withdrawal. There was a lot of fighting, a longish time, several weeks. After it was all over I came back to London shortly but then I got sent to Beirut to re-recruit the Palestinian staff, the ones who had all walked out and a lot of them were in Beirut.

AW: And they were all Palestinians?

RFW: Yes, they were all Palestinians. That was rather a nice job because it gave me another bit of time in Beirut; the nightclubs were still very good! And the Palestinians were remarkably venal and were happy under various elliptical descriptions to return. It had changed its name, before the invasions we called it “Voice of Britain” as opposed to “Voice of Arabs”. I think afterwards it became so tainted as a broadcaster that I don’t think they ever resuscitated it although I recruited a lot. I think they went back for a bit but it died a death.

It was a very funny experience but it was fun. I don’t know what happened to the archive. I would like to know because there was so much very good Arabic programming and cycles of Arabic music. It would have been very valuable stuff.

AW: Perhaps the BBC World Service might have got it in the end?

JFW: Yes, they might have done.

AW: Well there’s a question for our FO historians! So, after the short recruiting stint in Beirut, back to London again?

Foreign Office, 1957–61

RFW: Back to London, and into the Middle East Department dealing with the Suez Canal Users Association, which was the post Suez attempt by the British to continue to isolate the Egyptians and get international control of the Canal and its operation. People like the Norwegians were very much interested. Of course in the end, quite rightly, it didn’t work and the Egyptians proved they could run ships down the Canal just as well as anybody else. Thank you very much! There was wonderful letter in the Times at one stage from an Admiral who said “What’s all this nonsense about the Egyptians not being able to run the Canal, you just drive straight down it”. Quite right! The Users Association fizzled. We did quite a lot of work on it, displacing the Egyptians but you would have had to use the Egyptians, it was a logical no go. So Nasser won. The place was nationalised, Eden was out. At one stage I was involved in the Department with some of the machinations with the French but I actually can’t remember the detail. Selwyn Lloyd was the Foreign Minister and he was quite a good Foreign Minister and very nice to work anywhere near, very nice.

AW: So after the Users Association you moved on to the News Department in 1958?

RFW: Yes, I went down on the Middle East desk in the News Department and that was an amusing time too. It was a very interesting time and included the first time we started relations again with Iraq after Nuri Said was assassinated. That was the time of the easing back and one of the great turning moments was whether we were going to supply fighter aircraft to the Iraqis. I certainly learnt that while you can go as near to the truth as you can, you must never tell a lie to the press. There was one terrible moment when we were going to sell these aircraft, and I knew that we were going to sell these aircraft. The decision hadn't been taken, but it was absolutely clear that it would be taken within 24 hours. The press were very much onto this and the Daily Mirror was then run by Cecil King, and his son Michael King was their foreign correspondent. We had open news conferences and then we had groups in the afternoon. There was a Middle East group which one of my superiors ran. I remember Michael King, who was an enormous man, hitting the table and saying "Do you mean to tell me you haven't decided to sell fighters to the Iraqis?" I knew that in 24 hours I had to say yes but I knew at that point I could say no. So I said "No, Michael, we haven't". It was the nearest to the edge! But I did not tell a lie, we had not taken the decision and the Secretary of State had not signed in red ink! Dealing with the Middle East in the News Department was quite hairy. I had a boss, who sadly died the other day. The Daily Express, with the Crusader with the chain as the logo, was running something and I said to my boss "We have to deal with this with the Daily Express", and this chap said "Well why, we don't have to deal with it, it's just the Express" (*I've forgotten the exact detail of the story*). So I said, "The Express is what people think, so we should deal with it", but he said "when I want to know what the people think, I ask my wife"! It was Powell Jones, he was the Assistant Head of the Department and there were three heads of department at that time. The first was a man called Russell who was the son of the very powerful Police Commissioner in Cairo, a real colonial figure, and John Russell was his son. He was a very flamboyant character and he was succeeded by a man called Peter Hope. Peter really didn't know the difference between the truth and interest. He was known as "Faith, Hope and Charity"! Perhaps these are things one shouldn't broadcast, but they were all very good operators in News Department. And then a chap called Alan Campbell who was one of the first people to see the importance of the EC negotiations which were very difficult to comprehend and luckily he did comprehend them. And there were a lot of difficult times.

I was called in at the weekend once. I came up to the Clive Steps but the gate was locked. I jumped over the gate and walked in. I waved to the policeman standing by the door, said I

was the duty officer and walked into the Foreign Office. Amazing change! I literally climbed over the gate because I couldn't be bothered to walk round.

AW: At that time you said in your notes, it was the period when the Foreign Office and the Commonwealth Office merged? Did you get involved in this process?

RFW: Yes I did in the sense that I was slightly desk officer for that which meant meetings. That was mostly internal obviously. The Foreign Office was a bit snooty about the Commonwealth Office – “colonial outbacks”! - and didn't really want to have to deal with it, but it made sense. That was at the time of ground nuts. There was a great ground nut scandal in Ghana I think which was said to be the result of the colonialists! We spent several months saying “Not us guv”!

AW: So in 1959 you mention the UN General Assembly?

RFW: Yes, I went as the News Department person. When the delegation goes to the General Assembly they always take a News Department person and that was a great experience. Ormsby-Gore was the Minister who led the delegation and Pierson Dixon was the Permanent Representative. Ormsby-Gore was a great friend of the Kennedy family, had great connections and that was the time when Khrushchev beat the table with his shoe. That happened when I was there. Immediately after that there was a very funny incident. I wasn't in the building at the time but I was outside. Khrushchev wanted to come out of the tall building and there was someone on the 32nd or 40th floor, miles up, who opened a window to look out and watch. So a policeman shouted “Shut that window”, but the chap up there was leaning out saying “What?” and Khrushchev was fuming inside because of course he wasn't allowed out and security kept him for about twenty minutes. It took about twenty minutes to find out a) which floor this chap was on and b) to get to it and shut the window. So Khrushchev was there having just belaboured the United Nations in a big way and banged his thing, fuming in the lobby because he wanted to storm out!

The other thing I remember about that meeting is that Castro came. There were all these tremendous stories about him frying chickens in the Ritz suite. He only came for a couple of days but he must have addressed the Assembly, but it was at the same time as Khrushchev so it was politically very charged. The Brits didn't have much input into this and actually I can't remember the details of the main issues but it was US and Russian relations, Russian relations with the UN.

Ormsby-Gore was a lovely man. He was a great jazz enthusiast. We used to go out in the evenings and saw wonderful people like Red Norvo, I think it was, who played the xylophone, who was a particular favourite! He played the xylophone rather well!

There wasn't any major British major issue as I remember it, but it was also the session when Cabot Lodge addressed the Security Council about the iniquities of Russia and its espionage. He produced the bug that the Russians had managed to put in the beak of the American eagle that was above the American Ambassador's desk in Moscow! Cabot Lodge made an amazing denunciation about what cads the Russians were. Using the eagle!

AW: After the trip on this delegation, it must have been coming to the end of your time at News Department? We have reached 1960 and your posting to Paris?

Paris, 1961–63

RFW: Yes that's right, off I go to Paris. There I was again in the Information Department. I was number two under a wonderful man called Brooks Richards who had been SOE. Brooks was my great hero. Brooks was desperate to go on leave when I was due to arrive so, fine, I came in. The day after I got there Brooks left, leaving me in charge. Brooks lent me his Jaguar! He'd never seen me before in his life, but he said "I have to go on leave, have my Jaguar". Also, I had an introduction to the Irish number two, who was Conor Cruise O'Brien's number two in Paris. I went to dinner there in this Jaguar, met, and she's still a great friend, the most beautiful Irish girl who was the first Irish model in a big Paris fashion house, Balenciaga, called Moira Boylan. Anyway coming back from this, driving too fast down the Champs-Élysées, suddenly arrived at the Concorde to a mass of tanks! I came whizzing down to 22 tanks all around the Concorde! Because it was the time of Algérie Française.

There were two issues that concerned us while I was in Paris. One, the negotiation to try to get into the European Community, as it was. De Gaulle was determined to keep us out which was obvious really. The Foreign Office made an awful mistake because in the end it killed him [*Pierson Dixon*]. They made Pierson Dixon who was by then Ambassador in Paris also chief negotiator for the EEC, on the grounds that since he was on the spot the French would love him and be nicer to us as a result on the basis of Pierson Dixon's relations with de Gaulle, etc. Absolute miscalculation and in the end the strain was awful. Pierson Dixon died six months after he retired and personally I'm convinced it was the strain. Having to be nice

in Paris and then having to go to Brussels and finding they weren't nice. I think it killed Bob Dixon who was a very nice man.

So the two issues were what was happening in France with Algérie Française and the other was the EEC. It was very exciting in terms of French politics because all those great de Gaulle speeches happened when I was there "Françaises, Français, aidez moi", and the most annoying for us though we said of course he really didn't mean it, was "Vive le Quebec libre". The Embassy was, as happens very often, in a state of not believing what is happening in front of your face because you don't want to believe it. De Gaulle couldn't be so stupid as to try and keep us out of the EEC. He actually looked further forward because there was a time when Heath was Europe Minister, (we had Macmillan at Fontainebleau and Douglas-Home at various intervals). There was a time after one of Heath's visits that de Gaulle said, roughly speaking, "The English are not yet ready or fit to join Europe but when 'le petit Heath' is Prime Minister, they will be ready to come". And this was when Heath was only a Minister. But it was absolutely clear that de Gaulle was going to block everything during those negotiations and we went on thinking he can't be so stupid, or he can't be so ungrateful. He was totally forgetting his relations with Churchill. But we went on plugging this.

There were some little leaflets being produced by anti-Gaullists, a lot of them were Corsican separatists. One of my jobs was to keep in touch with them. Because they were all anti de Gaulle, they were pro-British and us getting into the EEC and we persuaded them to write in their leaflets "Independence for Corsica and EEC entry for the British". They all spoke very thick Corsican and my French was OK, but it wasn't exactly tremendous and trying to deal with a Corsican down a telephone was quite a challenge. There were two of them. They'd been in the Resistance, which was how Brooks had connected with them.

Before the Office sent me to Paris, they forgot to ask me about languages. Finally they rang me up and said "Do you speak French?" I explained I'd school boy French, so they said "Well you can learn, can't you!" So I wasn't going to pass up Paris for a lesson or two!

And there were '*Plastiques*'. On the biggest night there were 17 '*Plastique*' attacks in Paris. There was the assassination attempt at Le Petit-Clamart on de Gaulle. It was also the time when the paratroops of General Salan from Algeria did take off but turned back.

That particular night I was in a small bistro having supper next to two French people. The very agitated woman said “Jacques, Jacques, les paras arrivent, quesque tu fais?”, long pause, “Moi, je prends une entrecote”.

I had the most wonderful flat by then in the rue de Rivoli. On the third floor looking out over the Tuileries and you could see from the Tour St Jacques to the Arc de Triomphe. I would walk to the Embassy through the garden from the Avenue de Gabrielle at the back using the door that Marat used to go into Josephine’s house. Fantastic thought every morning. I had a key which let me in, absolute magic!

We had one or two friends in the French press, the man who ran Le Monde at the time. Beuve-Mery who was the founder of Le Monde I think, and the great man of Le Monde was of course a friend of Brooks Richards because I think Beuve-Mery had been in the Resistance too. Figaro, I managed to have very good contact with the diplomatic editor of Figaro. Actually, Figaro, more than Le Monde, was prepared to be pro-British but I found a surprising amount of anti-British sentiment. The French on the whole preferred the Germans to the English, not surprising, the Germans were their neighbours and we had clobbered their iconic figures, Joan and Napoleon. There were certain bits of the press like Combat and Libération which were still good left wing papers, very interesting to know. There was a very good writer called Martin Monot who was with Libération I think.

There was also a lot of anti-American feeling over Vietnam. There were demonstrators walking down the avenues called “LBJ As-sas-in”.

But one could escape and I spent quite a bit of time in St Tropez and such nice places when they were villages, before Bardot and so on. And of course, that was the other thing, a great French wave was going on, films, Belle de Jour, and so on. There was a wonderful phrase in one of those films where the man is taking his girlfriend out and the waiter comes and he says he wants a steak ‘bleu mais chaud’. How you get both is rather difficult!

It was an interesting period in the sense of a failed British attempt, ricocheting off the French, and despite Macmillan and so on, nothing was going to budge de Gaulle. It was obvious and maybe we misread some of it and it didn’t make us a lot of friends along the way. So that was Paris.

AW: And next?

Cairo, 1963–65

RFW: They rang me up and said they would send me to Abu Dhabi to succeed James Craig, one of the great Arab speakers. I said “No way”. It was an absolute nonsense, that was a place where you needed good Arabic and to march in after James Craig I would have been the laughing stock of the place. By arguing they said “Oh well, damn you, you can go to Cairo”. Of course Cairo was somewhere I’d always dreamt of going!

At that time there was the Yemen War, we were repairing relations with Nasser and Egypt and I started life there in Information and then became Head of Chancery, I moved jobs while I was there. Donald Maitland again was the Counsellor and Harold Beeley was the Ambassador and then there was an Australian, whose name I forget, but I was made PNG with him, which was quite lucky. Why we were made PNG was over UDI in Rhodesia. Nasser who at that time was fully engaged in his circles of influence, first in the Arab world, then in Africa, and he was also fighting the Yemen War, felt he had to make a gesture when Smith proclaimed UDI and we did nothing about it. We didn’t send the gunboats in. The Australian and I were the two fall guys and were PNG’d. But with a remarkable delicacy. We were escorted to the boat in Port Said and the British flag was run up and the Chief of Protocol saluted us! It was extremely elegantly done.

Cairo was a lovely place to be. We lived in a big house which had been a senior official’s house and still belonged to the British Government. It was far above one’s pay grade! The Egyptians were lovely people.

AW: And how were they to the British at that time? Your Egyptian in the street?

RFW: Very pleasant, helpful and likeable. They are lovely people. There were two incidents which are so nice. I was in a football crowd and I stood on an Egyptian chap’s foot. Being British I said “Sorry” and he looked at me and he said, in English “No need to say sorry, I’ve been standing on that foot myself for 28 years”! How can you not like a people like that!

Another time in a fury I drove backwards down a one-way street and was stopped by a policeman. This was more or less in Arabic and I said “Why do you stop me? I am diplomatic”. It was a very stupid thing to say. And he said “There is a law”. And I said to him “Oh my brother, surely there can be no law between you and me?”. He gave a

tremendous grin, “Of course my brother there can be no law between you and me, please continue”.

Nasser mishandled the economy and so on. Out at Sakkara, where there are a lot of the tombs, I remember talking to a group, and basically I never knew what our friends were doing, whether they were undermining and hoping that Nasser would somehow go, but I asked them what they thought about the situation, for example, bread was expensive. They said “Well, we’ve had Pharaohs and he’s just another Pharaoh”.

The atmosphere in Egypt at that time was difficult but in some ways also very relaxed with us. I had a lot of good friends in the Arabic press. Al-Ahram, the major Egyptian newspaper was run by a friend of Nasser and the opposition paper was run by another family and we had good relations with them both. We managed to keep that going and although there was quite a lot of anti-British rhetoric from the Government and Nasser for fairly obvious reasons and the strains caused by the Yemen War, which were internally quite considerable. But nevertheless it kept on a very even keel. Harold Beeley, who was my first Ambassador, was the man who was Under Secretary in the Foreign Office at Suez and he walked in one day (he was dead against the invasion) and said “Nobody seems to be taking my advice, I’m out”. And he just walked out, like that. X years later he was invited back, because he was absolutely brilliant, and he ended up as Ambassador in Cairo and I was under him. He was a lovely man. The Head of Chancery, the one I succeeded was Donald Hawley, he ended up in Malaysia but his wife wrote a very good book about Arab Jewry. He was ex Sudan Civil Service. There were quite a lot of people in the Middle East part of the Foreign Office who actually had been in the Sudan Civil Service.

The later exodus of the British Embassy was at the Egyptian Israel War. That was very unfriendly and people were just bundled out. But I was extremely lucky and went out on what everybody knew was a propaganda excuse.

Cairo was lovely, it’s so huge. But now ... everything that’s going on ... So stupid this man Al-Sisi, but power has gone to their heads.

So we sailed off through the military back home, back to Blighty!

AW: So that must have cut your posting a little bit short?

RFW: Yes it did, it cut it short.

AW: And then you went into South East Asia Department? How did that feel after having been away?

RFW: Well, never sniffed or smelt South East Asia! A man called James Cable took me to lunch, and said “Well, here’s Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, get on with it”! There of course it was a wonderful time to be in that job.

RECOLLECTIONS OF GABRIELLE FYJIS-WALKER RECORDED AND TRANSCRIBED BY ABBEY WRIGHT.

AW: It is 5 December 2019 and this is Abbey Wright recording the recollections of Gabriele (Gaby) Fyjis-Walker. In 2013 we recorded the first part of the life of her late husband Richard (Dick) Fyjis-Walker. The recordings were sadly unfinished due to his death.

We had reached 1965 in his career when he became Assistant Head of South East Asia Department. We are going to pick up with Gaby to collect the memories that she has of the rest of Dick’s career and their diplomatic life together.

Gaby, you mentioned that although you and Dick were not together when he was Assistant Head of South East Asia Department that he was very proud of that part of his life. Can you remember some of the things he said about that?

GFW: Yes. I think he found the work very interesting. Obviously it was in the middle of the Vietnam War and so international politics mattered. The bit he was really proud of, I think, was the fact that Wilson never joined the war. He actually mentioned that a lot of times when the Americans decided not to join Margaret Thatcher in the Falklands, he said “Well, Wilson took the decision not to join the Vietnam War, so fair enough”.

AW: In 1969 Dick was Head of the Information Department, defending the BBC World Service and all the business of trying to keep that alive. You said he mentioned something interesting about the press?

GFJ: In my view he was an ideal person to deal with the press because he never imposed views on other people, but he was actually the master at allowing other people to think the Foreign Office way. What he did say was that you always have to tell the truth as Head of Information but you also have to give journalists a story, that’s what their existence is all

about, they have to write something. So you have to be imaginative enough to understand where they are coming from.

Ankara, 1971-74

AW: In 1972 Dick became Counsellor and Number 2 in our Embassy in Ankara in Turkey and that's when you came on the scene? And I understand from your notes that you had a rather exciting wedding in Turkey? Would you like to share that with us.

GFW: Yes indeed! Dick and I had met in London but Turkey was to be our first posting together. I was apprehensive about going to Turkey because I hadn't been out of Europe and thought this would be a very foreign land. But in fact it was much more Westernised due to Ataturk's rules and politics after the Ottoman Empire. One of the personal experiences we had of the Westernisation of Turkey was that we got married in 1973 in our dining room in Ankara. The Deputy Mayor of Ankara came with an assistant and the whole ceremony took about three minutes once they had identified our details, our identities. The only thing that I was asked, and that was the beginning and end of that ceremony, was whether I was marrying Dick out of my free will. The basis of that was that Ataturk had worked hard at suspending arranged marriages, and in fact barred them and they wanted to make sure that mine wasn't an arranged marriage.

AW: It was part of the process?

GFW: Yes it was, and when I said in Turkish "*Evet*" (which means yes) wondering if that would be lawful, they said "Fine, sign here" and they left the house.

AW: What was it like living as a diplomat in Turkey at that time?

GFW: I enjoyed it hugely, personally, because I loved the country, I loved the people. It was very easy to have access to Turks, we had lots of Turkish friends. I got involved in the British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara because I wanted to be involved in something that was relevant to the country. I had a very nice job as a volunteer looking at sherds and cleaning sherds and so on, learning a lot, and translating their tourist guide into German. That was a wonderful thing to do. We used a lot of our spare time travelling because it was a very interesting country particularly from the archaeological point of view. From iron age sites and Armenian churches in the East, and that was very exotic at the time going near the Syrian and Iranian border, to the Greek sites and the Roman sites all along the Aegean and

Mediterranean where they are absolutely breathtaking, from Ephesus to Troy to Aphrodisias, we managed to see a lot which was wonderful.

Our Turkish friends were very warm and very friendly but Dick and I coined a phrase that they could be '*Yok* minded'. *Yok* means No in Turkish. Once they had decided not to make compromises they wouldn't. We both particularly noticed it when the Turks invaded Cyprus in 1974 and the British were against the invasion. Quite a few of our friends actually distanced themselves from us because they felt that the British were not being loyal as the Turks would have expected. That was sad but lots of other friendships continued.

AW: That must have been quite a difficult time for Dick professionally?

GFW: Yes it was tricky but there were British Government policies that had to be followed.

AW: Who was your Ambassador at that point?

GFW: It was Horace Phillips with the lovely Idina who was a very exotic Kashmiri Indian lady I think. Horace was a wonderful Ambassador. He was very tolerant of our circumstances originally because we weren't married but lived together, which was unusual for the time. He was very supportive of us, so that was really very nice.

The Turks were tough. Once they decided on things they certainly did it. There was a major incident at the Black Sea involving personnel who I think were working at an Intelligence Outstation. I don't know how it happened but I know it was a very tense time. There were tense moments and the Turks were quite nationalistic and there was not much give and take once they had decided on a course.

AW: You must have both spoken very good Turkish because in your notes you mention that some of them thought that Dick was Turkish!

GFW: I think that was more his looks! When we would come into a room together they would think "Hmmm, now where is he from? He's not quite a Turk, but he must be from very close by, a little further east, but he could be Turkish because this girl looks German and he might have been a Turkish guest worker in Germany and brought her to live here"! That was their usual assumption. There were some quite graphic moments when the Turks didn't quite believe when he said he was a Brit. I remember a particularly funny moment in a shop when a Kurdish shopkeeper asked "Where are you from" and Dick said "I am a Brit" and he said "Really? I think you are a Kurd". He opened his shirt and showed his hairy chest and

said “I will only believe you are not a Kurd if you will open your shirt and show me that your chest isn’t as hairy”. So Dick, in the middle of a town somewhere had to open his shirt and show his chest which indeed wasn’t as hairy! So the Kurd backed off and said he could pass as a Brit. But this happened to us all over the Middle East because of his darkish looks, jet black hair, people thought he couldn’t be British.

Counsellor (Information), Washington, 1974–78

AW: And then you move on to Washington. How did the posting come about? Was it a choice? Or was it still at the stage where officers were posted?

GFW: I think we were told to go to Washington but I assumed if Dick really hadn’t wanted it (like when we were supposed to go to Lebanon but Dick said no for good reasons which I will explain in a minute), he could have said no. Washington was a Press Counsellor job and would have been attractive to Dick who had done press counsellor work before. To be in a quite challenging environment in the States I think he felt was a compliment.

AW: So that was in 1974 and Mrs Thatcher was Leader of the Opposition by then?

GFW: It must have been at the end of 1974 that we went. Dick was apprehensive about the famous 4th Estate who were of course ruthless. The British Press was also quite challenging. I remember before we arrived there was an article in an English newspaper saying that a Mr Papadapoulos had just left as Press Counsellor in Washington and now they were getting a Fyjis-Walker, whatever next! Washington was very much a one topic town. It’s a suburban town with one topic and that’s politics, or most of it. Dealing with journalists which Dick had to do was interesting but it was about politics and in the end everybody tried to top the information from somebody else so it was very competitive. I don’t remember lots of really interesting discussions about American politics, I just remember lots of point scoring.

I think Dick enjoyed the job but it was demanding. There was a moment when he was challenged by Margaret Thatcher who came on a visit to address the American Press Club as Leader of the Opposition. Having given her speech she realised that her blue dress had blended into the blue background behind the podium on which she was standing. She was not pleased and let that be known.

We also had fun moments where we both benefited from diplomatic life especially when the Queen came for the Bicentenary. Dick was responsible for the press arrangements of the trip

and travelled with the Queen north to Philadelphia and Boston. There was a reception on Britannia at the end of it where Dick was given the CVO. When she handed it to him she said that she thought he might find another box she presented him with even more useful. It contained beautifully made gold cufflinks with EIIR made by Spink. She obviously had a sense of humour which is often mentioned.

There were other benefits from Her Majesty's visit. There was a wonderful reception at the Ambassador's Residence in Washington. It was very glamorous. Bob Hope came and when he looked at the Henry Moore sculpture in the garden he said "Oh they look just like Sammy Davies Junior's cuff links" which was not actually untrue, it was quite a good remark. He was naturally witty.

AW: And who was the Ambassador?

GFW: It was Peter Ramsbotham who was absolutely wonderful. Dick really liked working with him. He was then succeeded by Peter Jay who was a political appointment and a journalist himself. I don't think that was such an easy relationship, but the one with Peter Ramsbotham was. We met him years after Dick retired at a funeral somewhere and Peter Ramsbotham very sweetly introduced Dick to a group of guests there as "he was one of my boys". He had that lovely friendly way...

We also danced in the White House with the Queen and President Ford present.

For me personally my greatest excitement and interest in Washington was abstract art. In Europe the artists hadn't been as progressive, or the whole movement not quite as progressive as in the States where it had really originated and was much more developed. Going to these art galleries, particularly the Hirschhorn Collection which was a privately funded fabulous modern art gallery, really represented so much of the American character that was admirable which was the forward looking, the daring, the trying out new things, risk taking which represented itself for me in abstract art. I personally also didn't enjoy the other side of America, which I thought of as the dark side of America, which was the obsession with material achievement. A lot of people worked just to get the next bigger fridge. Everything was always available and if you didn't have it then you had to work to get it. There was a very materialistic undercurrent which didn't exist in Europe at the time, not then. Now of course it's different unfortunately.

One learned a lot of things from the Americans of course.

AW: In Dick's note he says "sacked" by Peter Jay.

GFW: I wasn't sure if I should say it that way.

AW: Well, Dick did!

GFW: I wonder whether he might even have been proud of it! I did read Dick's Personnel notes which one was allowed to ask for once one had retired, and in them Peter Jay vehemently rejects this accusation. But that is how Dick felt. They didn't have an easy relationship, partly because Peter Jay thought as a journalist he knew the Press and could do things much better. So there were different views on how to run the department.

AW: It's quite interesting from the point of view that the Office doesn't have many political appointments ...

GFW: And certainly not then.

AW: Yes and it's been kept under control but nothing on a par with the American system of political appointments. But it's interesting to hear how these things actually worked.

GFW: Let me say quite frankly that Dick wasn't happy, and I suppose that Peter Jay wasn't happy either, so Dick was delighted when we were posted.

Counsellor, UK Mission to UN, NY, 1978–79

AW: And then you didn't move very far?

GFW: Yes and we were both delighted. We had gone to New York for the weekend and Dick rang the Embassy from there because he knew a telegram would be coming in about our next posting. The Office told him that we were going to New York to the UK Mission to the UN. His job, which he was really interested by, was to cover the first round of independence talks on Namibia. For the first time we made black friends because in Washington although 60 per cent were blacks, we only had a couple of black lawyer friends. In 1973/74 a very segregated city despite the Civil Rights Movement and Selma marches.

AW: But New York was different?

GFW: Yes! It was alive and had a huge mix of people and Dick enjoyed the job very much. The Ambassador, the UK Representative, was Ivor Richard, lovely man and the UK delegation was fun, everyone was bright and sparkly and quick.

AW: And the New Yorkers themselves?

GFW: Ah! Heavenly! We made full use of New York, went often to the Jazz Clubs, late jam sessions, and had a lot of fun. I worked in Washington as a freelance translator and for the IMF and in New York for the UN Protocol Department, so that was fun as well.

We had an apartment, a penthouse, on 68 and 2nd overlooking the river and I grew tomatoes and courgettes. It was a 1930s building, it wasn't one of the smart ones, in fact our Admin Officer thought it wasn't smart enough but actually everyone was longing to get invited to our parties. We had so much space, we had lots of dance parties, it was so much fun.

Ambassador to the Sudan, 1979–84

AW: And then quite a big change after that? Back into Dick's Middle Eastern, African roots, going to Sudan as Ambassador in 1979, this was your first Ambassadorial post.

GFW: For Dick he was obviously pleased to have achieved that role and I think he was also happy to be back in the Islamic world because he felt comfortable there, he'd been trained to speak Arabic, and he knew the mentality and felt this was a good post to start on his own.

It was the total opposite of America of course. *Ma fi* in Arabic means it is not available or there is not. And there was just a lot of *Ma fi*. This was a mud-brick town and I think the only concrete building was on the confluence of the White and Blue Nile and it was the Hilton Hotel. Almost everything else was mud brick. There were some concrete buildings and one of them was the Embassy, but there was frequently no electricity or no water. It had originally been called Shell House but one of the diplomats when we were there took the S out of it! So it was Hell House. They frequently had to work in 40 degrees, it was difficult.

The Sudanese are such delightful people, or they certainly were before Sharia was introduced by the time we left and which lasted for thirty years until these brave women recently, you know ...

AW: Yes, amazing.

GFW: Yes amazing, but it doesn't surprise me actually. There was an African element of liberation in the women, they weren't suppressed Islamic women originally, they were more African. They were delightful people to deal with. I think they liked the British although they had managed to kill Gordon. We had a tennis court in the Residence and Dick played

tennis with Sadiq el Mahdi who was the great grandson of the Mahdi who had killed Gordon. Dick beat him at most games, he was very pleased, revenge after all!

It was a life that certainly taught me a lot. After the land of plenty coming to a country where one learned that things were just not available and that was actually perfectly alright, one could do without them, life was perfectly alright without them. In summer the only available vegetables were courgettes and tomatoes because nothing else grew in 45/50 degrees. I have a charming memory of a friend who had asked me to tea and said when I got there that she was sorry the cake was not ready and it would take another hour because the chicken had only laid one egg in the morning and the next one was to come. It was too hot for chickens to lay eggs. There were lots of little incidents like that which one just accepted and we adjusted our lives like everybody else to getting up early and having a long siesta. In the evenings, from 9 o'clock onwards, the Sudanese in those good old days used to drift into the garden and sit under our acacia trees and drink whisky until 12 o'clock at night and then drift home. There was just gentle chat with really good friends, it was a very gentle, very nice life which taught me a lot.

AW: What was the size of the Embassy, how many staff did it have?

GFW: There were quite a lot of people working on development aid, there was a large defence staff, the British Army Training Team trained the Sudanese Army, there was a political section, it was a decent size and I think Dick felt he could actually fulfil a decent role there. It wasn't a tin pot post and his relations with the Sudanese were very good and close, we were asked a lot to Sudanese homes.

AW: When you were there did you have an interesting time with some elephant tusks and a visit by HRH the Duke of Edinburgh?

GFW: There were one or two memorable moments and that was possibly the most memorable one when HRH the Duke of Edinburgh came out to visit, he was President of the World Wild Life Fund at the time. I was pregnant and had gone back to England for the last three months to have Matthew there so I wasn't there during the visit, but he stayed in the house with Dick and the staff and Dick took him round the few sites that were preserved and one of them was the coral reefs in the Red Sea which I think are sadly gone now. At the time there wasn't much preservation and I think that is why the Duke came.

He stayed for four or five days, possibly a week, it was quite a lengthy stay. On the last day as he was preparing to leave Dick went downstairs because he saw a little van arriving and realised that the Chief of Protocol was in it. Dick opened the door and the Chief of Protocol said “We have a present in the car for the Duke” and opened the van doors. There were two large elephant tusks mounted on a platform and he said that this was for the Duke to take home. Dick realised that not much of the contents of this visit had actually penetrated the Sudanese way of thinking but quick-witted as he was, which also stood him in good stead as a press counsellor. He said “Thank you very much, this is wonderful, but the Duke will be deeply saddened to hear that we won’t be able to put the tusks on his rather small private plane on which he came, there will be no room, but as a memento of the visit he would love to have the base plate, so why don’t we take it and you take the tusks back”. Honour was saved all round.

To come back, if I may, to nothing being available and what a good lesson that was. One of the wonderful things for me was again travelling and of course desert travel. The Sudan had been rulers of Egypt at the end of BC and early AD and so there were wonderful pyramids but no roads to get to them. It was proper desert travel. We took the Landrover and went for two or three nights with camp beds but always with one or two friends with other Landrovers. Once we got stuck in the middle of absolutely nowhere and couldn’t work out what had gone wrong with our Landrover. We saw a chap appearing from a long distance, in the desert of course one sees very far. In his floating gellabiya he said “Can I help you?” in good English. He opened the bonnet, looked at it and said “Have you got a piece of soap?” Of course we had a piece of soap and it took him two seconds and the Landrover drove again! You don’t always need to pay your garage £500 for the screw that’s missing when a bit of soap will do! Those were the charming sides or the Sudanese.

The archaeology was wonderful, Egyptian ruins, Roman ruins and one of the most interesting things was a museum in Khartoum of Christian frescoes because the Ethiopians had come into Sudan and settled along the Nile as Christians and had started the first monasteries and also cells for mental illness, or at least that’s what the archaeologists assumed. There was a lot to see and do.

We managed to get to the south when there was a lull in the civil war but it did teach me also about the harshness of tribalism which we are in the middle of in 2019. It was all there.

In this period two really important things happened for us personally in the Sudan. One was the birth of our son Matthew after ten years of marriage. While I had gone to England to give birth to him, we came back with him when he was six weeks old and so he is a Sudanese at heart! The servants immediately included him in their lives. He had breakfast with them every morning of beans and bread and when he came back to England aged five he would always smile at black people rather than white people because that was his memory.

The other lovely thing that happened was that Dick was Chairman of the Cheshire Home and I was involved with the administration. It was there to rehabilitate disabled people. One day we were brought a boy from the refugee camps, because there was also the Ethiopian/Eritrean civil war going on and there were refugee camps in the Sudan. The boy had been orphaned and had been affected by polio and couldn't walk. He was probably about five years old. He was being operated on and was able to stand up and walk with crutches, and was in a wheel chair and so on. This happened just before we were supposed to go on our next posting. I had just had Matthew and I just couldn't leave Mohammed behind, I had become very attached to him. Dick and I decided to try and bring him back into Europe because there was a scheme called 'Ten Or More' at the time because there was a terrible drought in East Africa, and Western countries had committed themselves to taking in ten or more refugees. We realised we would have to go to Geneva to UNHCR and pull a bit of weight and say that we really would like this boy to leave the Sudan. We stayed in Geneva for a week and finally they agreed to send him to England, we couldn't take him with us because we were going abroad again, to the most wonderful home called Ockenden Venture in Surrey which was set up by someone who had inherited a lot of land and cottages from her parents, had lived through the Second World War, seen Polish refugees coming into England and thought that was something she could do. We went and looked at it before we committed to leaving him there. He was going to live in a house with other Eritreans and Africans and had the most wonderful house mother. We felt he was going to be safe and happy. At the time, it was 1980, and talking about a different Britain, he went to Alton from Hazelmere every day in a taxi which was funded by the local council to go to a school for disabled people, and was brought back every day. That wouldn't happen today. He still lives in a disabled flat in Woking which he was allocated twenty years ago and it's wonderful to see that he has been really welcomed in this country as a refugee and looked after. He's part of our family.

AW: In Dick's notes he mentioned the first Islamic punishments. I suppose that's to do with the introduction of Sharia Law?

GFW: Yes, absolutely. Just before we left, we'd had five years in the Sudan but maybe I should mention that after three years we were meant to go to Lebanon. There was a telegram from the Foreign Office saying "You're going to Lebanon and you won't regret it. Number 10 has agreed it" (it was still Margaret Thatcher). But it was literally at the height of the civil war, Matthew was just a year old. Dick said he would go and have a look at Lebanon and see what it was like. He went privately but sent back a telegram within ten minutes of arrival saying "I don't think so". At the time there were six military policemen living in the Residence on the ground floor. I couldn't have gone out into the garden with Matthew without a man with a gun next to us. At the time the Ambassador had to duck when he got out of the front door into the car in case he got shot at. Dick went to see an old friend of mine who was German Ambassador there at the time and his immediate question was "What are your options?" Because his chauffeur had been killed when taking him to the Embassy, by a bullet which went through a little gap in the window.

AW: A difficult decision?

GFW: A very difficult decision but I think Dick thought that for the sake of Matthew's upbringing it just wasn't the right thing to accept Lebanon. He said no. They were furious, you can imagine, because Number 10 had approved. They said in that case we would have to stay in the Sudan and we said fine, we like Sudan, it's safe here and if that's the price to pay, that's OK. But it did set his career back a bit. And so we were in Sudan for five years rather than three and I think by the end we were ready to go!

AW: And you had started witnessing some of these first Islamic punishments?

GFW: Yes exactly. We had heard the rumours but then the first shocking thing that happened was that a Sudanese doctor, who had been trained by the British, was the first one to undertake the chopping off of hands. We thought how is this possible, that a man who has been exposed to a different way of thinking could do this, and he was married to an English wife. It goes deep. We were fortunate enough to leave before our beloved Sudanese turned unexpectedly really, really unpleasant. We should have known some of it from the way they treated the southern Sudanese but of course the southern Sudanese didn't treat the northerners well either. So there was a ruthlessness underneath which we had never seen. I think we left the moment that Nimeiry who was then President stood on a bridge and threw all the alcohol from the duty free shop into the river Nile which was of course promptly then

imported in the lorries that brought fuel and the bottles were put into the fuel tanks, so everybody carried on getting their drink. But that was all rather sad.

Ambassador to Pakistan, 1984–87

AW: Having had your five years in Sudan we have reached 1984 and Dick was appointed Ambassador to Pakistan?

GFW: Yes and I think he was really pleased and relieved because that was on promotion. It was a very big Embassy, certainly the largest in the region because of the huge consular section because of all the immigration of Pakistanis. There was a huge aid section and there was a good economic section. It was an interesting time for Dick. I think he enjoyed it. He had good relations with the Pakistanis, he looked like President Zia with his moustache! We were lucky because he was a benign military dictator rather than one chopping off hands. We were also very lucky because it was during a time when the “good” mujahideen were in Pakistan because they supported the Afghans against the Russian invasion or whatever you want to call it and so we were able to travel all over the country. It is a beautiful country, in the north with the Himalayas, our house was literally at the foothills of the Himalayas, and in the south with the Indus River. We had wonderful weekends in snow covered mountains. It was a really good place. Pakistanis, like the Sudanese, were very forgiving about the Raj and never held it against him or us, so there were easy relations and we had lots of friends.

AW: And it was a relatively quiet time?

GFW: Yes. We travelled to the Afghan border but couldn't go across because of the Russians and there were lots of border posts. But one knew about the problems mainly through the huge generosity of the Pakistanis. We went to look at a refugee camp of two million Afghans inside Pakistan. We visited a British Red Cross medical team who were doing some work there. The Pakistanis were very generous like the Turks are today, or have been until very recently. We could learn lessons in Western Europe from the generosity of these other countries when it comes to refugees.

We also saw on our travels, which I certainly didn't realise at the time, down in Baluchistan on the Afghan border lots of new schools being built. I rather naively told people in the Embassy about it who said it was the Saudis funding schools. I don't think anybody had thought quite as far as 9/11 but they were building up Islamic support and pure Islamic teaching.

British engineering was amazing, the remains of the Raj, impressive barrages, you could still see that they had done a lot of good, maybe not all good but a lot of good as well.

I think Dick was happy to retire from Pakistan, he was not the sort of person who worried about being called Sir Richard, he was quite relaxed about it all and felt it was a good post to retire from. We had several Ministerial visits, Geoffrey Howe when he was Foreign Secretary, Lord Bramall was Chief of the Defence Staff, the Development Minister, David Mellor, they all stayed in the Residence but I won't be indiscreet about who was my least favourite guest and who took over the Residence as if it was his own! So there was plenty of business for Dick to get involved in.

AW: And you knew President Zia?

GFW: Yes. And in typical Pakistani hospitality we'd been invited there and he had a wonderful Raj type weekend outing for the diplomatic corps when he laid on trains and we were all fed on stations, that was fun. He very sweetly came to our last Queen's Birthday Party where we had a British military band from India. Matthew (who is in the army today) stood at the door with a little plastic sword greeting the President. And the President brought him a toy car, it was so considerate. There was that sort of family atmosphere among the Pakistani Government and the British. It was all friendly and pleasant and we retired from there.

You will know that when one retires as Ambassador the last luxury that one is given is that when one arrives at home there is an official car waiting to take you home in England. There was this car, Matthew was with us and we arrived in Stonefield Street in Islington which at the time wasn't very developed. So I told Matthew this was our new house and he said "No Mum it can't be, there is no EIIR crescent on the door". But he then started at the local state school in Islington and got used to thing changing very quickly!

Dick loved his time in the Foreign Office, that was what he had wanted to do. He felt he'd been treated very well. I have some of his personal biographical notes and he says in them that given his ability he'd done very well as far as his career was concerned and of course we had a very interesting time, and I'm as grateful as he would have been for all the privilege we've experienced in being exposed to different cultures and all that with a very decent lifestyle. I was able to work for the first ten years. When he was Ambassador that wasn't

possible any longer, but I had lots of interests and a totally full life. We were just grateful for every moment we spent.

AW: And you are now doing a little paying back with the Pimpernel?

GFW: Yes, well I think they are continuing to pay me! It's just very nice to continue being in the atmosphere of the Foreign Office. I can help some elderly colleagues which is nice obviously and we also help colleagues who are abroad but whose parents are here. We were lucky enough never to be in that situation but if you are abroad and your elderly parents have to be accompanied to a hospital or whatever, we can arrange those things as well as accommodation problems, medical problems, care home problems, we try and help them as much as we can. There is a group of us volunteering who are run by the very lovely Jonathan Sweet, so we are all happy about that. And it's fun for me to continue, I go to lectures here in the Foreign Office, my interest in international politics has continued, so that's all great; and good to see you too!

AW: Yes! Well I love this work for the BDOHP, some similar reasons, it keeps that bridge, that link to the FCO.

GFW: Yes exactly, it's our lives. Lucky lives we have had.

AW: Thank you so much Gaby.

