

BDOHP Interview Index and Biographical Details

David Gladstone

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RECOLLECTIONS OF DAVID GLADSTONE CMG

RECORDED AND TRANSCRIBED BY ABBEY WRIGHT

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AW: This is 8 September 2015 and this is Abbey Wright recording David Gladstone's recollections of his diplomatic career. You joined the Office in 1960, and you went first to MECAS. What made you decide to join the Diplomatic Service?

DG: Very simple! I couldn't think of what else to do. I left Oxford without any clear direction and spent a year in the City of London being an articled clerk to a firm of chartered accountants because my father thought it would be a good thing in case I ever went into any sort of business. I soon discovered that wasn't what I wanted to do but by then I had missed out on the usual Oxford entry to the Foreign Office and I thought it was probably going to be too late and I was going to have to do something else. I had always enjoyed languages and travelling, I was born in India, and at that stage my future wife was on the scene and she wanted to get out of this country and she thought I should join the Foreign Office. It was partly because she had a friend in the American Embassy, daughter of the Minister, and she had been very impressed by how well treated American diplomats were and we assumed the British would be similar. Having nothing better to do I thought "I won't get in, but I'll try" and I did get in.

MECAS, 1960-62

AW: Did they send you off to MECAS straight away?

DG: Pretty much straight away. There was some sort of induction but, as you know, there was no training at the Foreign Office, unless you count MECAS as a training. You were told one or two things at the outset and I remember attending a sort of question and answer session as to what the CRO was, what the Commonwealth was, but I didn't learn anything much from that. The Foreign Office wanted me to learn Arabic, so I went.

Looking back on it, it was very exciting. This was the time of Burgess, Maclean, Philby and George Blake who was on my actual course. I rubbed shoulders with the great man! It was unrepeatable because you could never recreate those conditions now. Lebanon in 1960 was another world. There was a fully functional social scene, people with money throwing parties, a casino down the road. Above all I enjoyed it because I had a fast car and we could

travel around the Middle East. Learning Arabic was a kind of sideshow for me because I fairly quickly decided, I'm afraid, that I was never going to be an Arabist. The Foreign Office had chosen me to do Arabic, it wasn't my choice, I really wanted to use my European languages which I already had, but I went and enjoyed my time there but at the end of it said "Sorry, I don't think this is for me". And I think to their great credit the Foreign Office, despite having expended a fair amount of money teaching me said "OK, we don't want reluctant Arabists, we'll let you off".

Third Secretary, Bahrain, 1962

AW: But they did send you to Bahrain?

DG: Yes, I spent one year in Bahrain and that was interesting.

AW: And you were posted there as Press Officer - your note amused me very much, "in a country with no press"?

DG: At the end of our time in MECAS when we were given our marching orders, the best officers were going off to our Embassies in Amman, Beirut, etc. I was posted to the Political Agency in Bahrain and I was told that no one from the so-called "A stream" at the Foreign Office had been sent to that post before. So I started with low expectations, and this was borne out by the fact that I was being sent to a post where there was ostensibly nothing to do.

What I did have to do was to act as a judge in the Foreigners Court. There had been one law court in Bahrain which had dealt with all justice but by the time I got there, the Bahrainis had taken back the jurisdiction for their own people while the British tried cases concerning foreigners. So that was my job, to sit, not very often but occasionally, and try these cases.

We had a very expert Bahraini clerk who sat beside me and prompted me as to what was expected and I had a few cases which came up to me. It was a good experience, if I'd wanted to become a judge but, again, no training. I was just launched into it.

One case involved a Chinese seaman - a lot of sea traffic came into Bahrain - who had been picked up carrying opium which even then was a punishable offence. So he was hauled up and I duly questioned him. All his replies were very predictable - "he'd got it for his own use". My maximum sentencing capacity was six months. So I duly exercised my full rights and sent him to prison for six months. The prison in Bahrain was on an island a few miles away. He went down and I said to my clerk that I would quite like to go and visit this

prisoner afterwards and see what effect the sentence had had on him. It was a heartening view of justice I thought. I was taken into the prison and he was brought along. When he knew who I was, he fell on his knees saying “Thank you, thank you, because I’ve been in prison, I’ve been able to kick my habit which I’d never have done if I’d been going on as I was”. So I felt that I had done a good deed!

AW: And how many people were there, was it a big post?

DG: No, the Agency was very small, about six of us in all. The Residency, which covered the whole Gulf, was where the smarter people went. The Agency was an outpost although it was in the same place, as it were. The Political Agent was the boss, who was a successor to political agencies that had been running in the Gulf for many years. It is hard to imagine now but, fifty/fifty-five years ago, we were running almost everything in Bahrain and the Gulf States. We were responsible directly for foreign affairs and defence affairs and until very recently we had also been running all the internal affairs, including justice. It was another world and it was still the tail-end of the Raj and Pax Britannica and all that and which was quite familiar to me because I’d been born in India and brought up in the Raj so it didn’t surprise me. It’s just now, looking back ...people born today just wouldn’t understand.

AW: And were your living conditions equally Raj-like?

DG: No, my living conditions were quite Spartan. The Agent had a nice old colonial house but the rest of us lived in concrete bungalows, or one up two down which of course in Bahrain had to be air-conditioned. It was quite uncomfortable. The temperatures in the Gulf are not as extreme as in Iraq and some other places but they are consistently hot and above all humid and take a lot of getting used to. By then I was married and was accompanied. We both actually enjoyed Bahrain, it was very undemanding, a rather relaxed regime in the office and also outside the office. The only problem was that the social life almost entirely revolved around the British expats of one sort or another, so you went to cocktail parties and you met the same round of British people by and large although we met some smarter Bahrainis too.

This is where I came slightly unstuck. I went to one of these cocktail parties wearing a tropical shirt, with which I’d equipped myself in London before going out, a very smart Italian shirt but it was very pale blue. The following day my boss, the Agent, called me into his office and said “I’ve had a report that you were seen at a cocktail party last night wearing a blue shirt”. I couldn’t think what to say and said “Yes, it was actually”. It was made very

clear to me that this was not on and that I was not to do that again. And that is how things were in those days, an old fashioned, strict, post-Imperial set up. The British didn't mingle more than was necessary with other people and there weren't many other people to mingle with apart from Bahrainis who we met professionally but not so much socially.

I don't know whether I should tell the other story...

AW: Why not, yes please do.

DG: Well it does show how things have moved on a bit. The second time I was hauled up by my boss into his office he said "I've been informed that when you were in Beirut before you came here, you had an overdraft". We all banked with the British Bank in the Middle East and I had indeed taken out an overdraft when I was at MECAS because I wanted to buy a car to enable me to swan around. I thought no more of it and paid off the overdraft and then was confronted with this fact a few months later in Bahrain and reminded that Diplomatic Service Regulations said you mustn't have an overdraft. So that marked my card. I realised that the Political Agent could talk to a Bank Manager who was in Beirut, but with a branch in Bahrain as well, and could learn one's private business. So I didn't take out another overdraft. That might strike some people today as a little bit odd.

AW: Who was the Political Agent?

DG: A man called Ted Wiltshire. His background is part of this whole story because he'd spent all of his life in the Levant in the Levant Service and therefore he'd hardly set foot in England since he'd joined at the beginning of his career. He'd circulated between Persia, Bahrain, Lebanon and Syria and his whole mind set was not geared to affairs of Great Britain. He was a perfectly nice man but he was a little bit, you might say, limited in some experience.

AW: So you were in Bahrain for a year? Then returned home?

Third Secretary, General Department, Foreign Office, 1963-65

DG: Yes I was posted back to London and then as I was at the bottom of the heap I was posted to the General Department, otherwise known as the "odds and sods" department or more correctly the "fish and ships" department. It dealt with maritime affairs and all the other things they couldn't think where to put.

They made one crucial mistake if they were trying to demote me because they posted me to the one really interesting job which was peaceful uses of atomic energy.

AW: Yes, and that was just really getting going?

DG: Yes it was. The reason they thought it was safe to send someone like me there was that no one else in the Foreign Office knew anything about atomic energy and assumed that it wasn't really a Foreign Office subject but nevertheless had to cover it ... because, because, because, and had to find someone to do it, no matter who.

I had a whale of a time there for two and a half years because finding no one else knew about the subject I soon learned quickly more than anybody else and discovered that there were actually things to do. Very soon after I arrived there, one of these things arose. The Americans were trying to establish a legal regime that would allow them to send their nuclear powered merchant ships around the world, but they were having a lot of trouble because this was all totally new and when a nuclear powered ship arrived in a foreign port, the first question the port authority asked was "What are the insurance arrangements?" The answer was that there weren't any because it was new and nobody quite knew what to do and hadn't got hold of the idea of absolute liability. It fell to me to negotiate the first international agreement allowing these ships to visit foreign ports. The Americans were dead keen that their SS Savannah should visit Southampton, I think it was, as a demonstration that these things could be done and their oldest ally would, of course, oblige. And we did oblige. I was told to negotiate an agreement with the American Embassy and I did. But I did it unsupervised because nobody above me knew what it was about! I discovered the Legal Advisers who were a great mainstay and I made great use of them afterwards but this was the first time I realised you could do very useful things with good legal advice. They are wonderful people, the Legal Advisers, not only give advice on international law but they are thoroughly plugged in to the Foreign Office way of doing things and saw their job as being part of helping to do what needed to be done rather than saying "No you can't do that".

I used to meet with the Counsellor from the American Embassy, and there was me the Third Secretary at the bottom of the heap with the Counsellor at the top conducting an important bit of American foreign policy. I would discuss things with him and then come back and talk to the Legal Advisers and eventually we agreed a draft of a treaty which I had to submit to higher authority, and that was all right. We of course had to keep in touch with the Department of Science, as it then was, doing the domestic bit of atomic energy and the UK

Atomic Energy Authority were involved too. Their senior people expressed surprise at one point that the Foreign Office were fielding someone quite so junior to deal with this. The treaty was duly ratified and came into force and did provide a template for future visits of this kind.

AW: The General Department did presumably have a Head?

DG: It had a Head, yes. He changed soon after I got there but neither the previous one, nor the successor wanted to become much involved in this, it was all a bit difficult and abstruse and they preferred to focus on maritime law and other things. The Assistant in the department was dealing with space and satellite communications, a new subject which was recognised as important for the Foreign Office. So the department, in as much as it had a focus, was very much over there and I just got on with what I was doing.

The second thing that was building up was the question of safeguards on the use of atomic energy materials. As anybody who has been reading about Iran and similar cases knows quite well, there is a component of nuclear proliferation and there was a new concept that there wasn't any control, no rules. Again, there was a small group of us going to Vienna, the home of the International Atomic Energy Agency, to negotiate with people there how to run this business. Again, I was the British representative and I went out there ...

AW: With your atomic hat on!?

DG: Yes. Every year there was an annual meeting of the Agency and I used to go out and spend a week in Vienna, but in between times I was corresponding with the people that were helping to build that up and that was where this question of safeguards got going which was exciting. The nuclear industry was in full flood, everyone said it was the future and Britain had a very ambitious building programme of nuclear reactors and one became quite expert in the difference between "gas cool" and the others. I enjoyed my stay there greatly but it came to an end.

AW: That was just over two and a half years? And then, presumably, you were getting itchy feet to travel again and your ambition to go to Europe is achieved?

First Secretary, Bonn, 1965-69

DG: It was accidentally achieved, I think! I was called into Personnel Department and told that I was being posted to Germany. I said "Hooray, that's just what I want" - because although I read History at Oxford, I got into Oxford on my German and French and those were my great loves. So I thought that if the Office were sending me to Bonn I could play to my strengths for once. The posting officer told me that I was going to liaise between the British Army on the Rhine (BAOR) and the Embassy. I said "That means I will be talking to British people?" and he said that yes, I wouldn't have to speak any German. So my assumptions had been a little bit premature, but as a good loyal servant I went out and spent time dealing with the Brigadiers.

AW: Did you enjoy dealing with the military? You had served in the Army previously?

DG: Yes, luckily I had done National Service so I enjoyed dealing with Army people and could talk to them. They would take me a bit more seriously. All the same I did get slightly itchy feet because it wasn't quite what I had joined up for. But then I got a break. My life has been punctuated by lucky breaks. Not long after taking that job up, there was an incident on the River Elbe, the frontier between the Federal Republic and the GDR. We Brits were responsible for it because we were responsible for the reunification of Germany and everything that happened on frontiers up to then was ours. My job dealing with the Forces entailed dealing with the people who guarded the border and it was an added bonus to find out that I was responsible for the borders of Germany.

AW: You keep being put in charge of really important things!

DG: Yes, but nobody expected this to be important, because nothing was expected to happen on the borders. But in early 1966 what was happening was that the East Germans were testing the limits and trying to prove that they were the equal of the Federal Republic, and the Russians encouraged them. They were shooting their own people who were trying to escape, most conspicuously in Berlin going over the Wall but they were also swimming across the River Elbe and they were shooting them there. The question arose, very Germanic in a way, but would probably have happened here in similar circumstances, as to where exactly the border was. The East Germans standing on the East bank were shooting at people as they crossed into the West. The common assumption was that you were in the West when you crossed over half way but there was doubt about that. So the Germans themselves called a

meeting to try and sort this out and I was called along to represent the overall Powers' view. So I took a Legal Adviser along and he made himself expert on the law regarding river boundaries. There were twenty one German officials representing all the agencies involved who all gave slightly differing views of the law. We let them talk but then said we thought that the answer was to be found in a German document dating back to such and such a date and I said that my Legal Adviser would explain. He explained in masterly legal language a doctrine that had been laid down by a German lawyer 100 years earlier about the demarcation of river boundaries. It was really rather simple and the Germans should have known it for themselves. It's a concept which is also known in English law as the Thalweg. The Thalweg means literally the valley way and means that the middle of the river is not the geographical middle but the navigable strip which varies as it goes along from side to side. So at any given point you have to establish where the Thalweg is and then take the centre point of that. So that was that. We laid down the law and it became the rule from then on, very enjoyable. Again, I don't think anyone in the Foreign Office knew about this.

AW: And you were the British member of the Bonn Group?

DG: My next stroke of luck came a couple of months after this. The then member of the Bonn Group, which was the coordinating group in Bonn of the Americans, Russians, French, British and Germans, was Julian Bullard, an eminent member of the Foreign Office, and a Fellow of All Souls. He was coming to the end of his time in Bonn and for some reason, I don't know why, he recommended that they shouldn't get in somebody new from the Office to succeed him but to use me because I was already there. It was agreed and from April/May that year I became the British member of this rather august group which was charged with preserving the status of Berlin. Our job was to hold the line pending reunification, which nobody believed in.

AW: Was there no hope on the German side at that time?

DG: The Germans had written in to their Constitution the statement that the German Government was obliged to work towards reunification. So every new German Chancellor who came in knew what they had to do. But it was slightly like the Labour Party and Clause 4, Labour Prime Ministers knew they were supposed to work for the nationalisation of everything that moves or doesn't move, but who believed that was really going to happen? The Germans all knew that they were bound to work for reunification but very few Germans really expected it and my impression at the time was that few Germans actually wanted it

because they knew very well that there would be sacrifices to be made if they were to absorb increasingly less well developed East Germany, although that is what eventually happened.

My job was to uphold the status quo, carry on confronting the Russians and telling them to stop their East Germans eroding our boundaries and so on. That involved dealing with Berlin for the first time. It was exciting. It was a long time after the Air Lift but memories were still there and the Cold War was very much still on and you could never be quite sure that the Russians wouldn't do something to stir it all up again. So we all had to keep our eyes on the ball. We had regular meetings.

AW: Did you visit the Eastern Sector?

DG: We had our own mission in West Berlin which was in the front line for dealing with all of that but nonetheless we in Bonn were responsible for the planning and evolved very elaborate and secret Berlin Contingency Plans so we knew exactly if the Russians were to do such and such, we would do such and such and the Army and the Air Force were fully involved in these plans. We used to do exercises from time to time; it was a very well-oiled machine and given the differences of approach from the Four Powers, it worked extremely well for a long time and was very enjoyable because the other people involved in this were very exceptional. We had a lot of fun along the way.

There was one occasion when a brand new Russian fighter bomber plane dived straight into the Havel Lake, which was in the British Sector and disappeared down into the bottom. If we had constructed this scenario into our plans it would have been laughed out of court as too unlikely! We were confronted by a situation which had not been foreseen. The plane was clearly Russian property and we didn't want to provoke an incident by refusing to give it back to them but equally we didn't want to give it back until we had learned a little bit about it. My job was to keep the thing in our hands long enough to let our experts have a good look. We couldn't bring it up to the surface because the Russians would see what we were doing so our intrepid divers had to go to work unseen and we had to pretend that nothing was going on. Meanwhile the Russian Embassy in Berlin was continually badgering the Head of our Berlin Mission, Peter Hayman, to give their property back. I was sitting in Bonn receiving telegrams from him deep into the night saying that the pressure was getting intolerable and couldn't we give this thing back now? My bosses were telling me to try and calm him down, so my job was to keep him calm and explain that we were sorry but couldn't do it just yet because it was difficult to get the thing up and blah blah blah!

There is a coda to this story. Our man on the spot was Peter Hayman. I asked myself at the time “Why is this man showing so little back bone?” He was wanting to give way at the first sign of Russian pressure. We successfully got through the business, we found out what we wanted from it and the thing was handed back to the Russians.

AW: And who was your overall boss, the Ambassador at that time?

DG: I had two Ambassadors. The first was Frank Roberts, one of our great post War diplomats in Russia and Germany, a wonderful man. He was succeeded by Roger Jackling in my last year or so. He was a different sort of person. He didn't have the same experience or the same way of dealing with the Russians as Frank Roberts.

AW: So the Ambassador during the Havel Lake incident was still Frank Roberts?

DG: Yes. My Head of Chancery who was more directly involved was Andrew Stark, a tough Scot, not inclined to bend.

AW: In your notes for this period you also mention a concert in East Berlin by Hermann Prey?

DG: Yes, I went up to stay with a colleague in Berlin, which I did from time to time, and he told me about the concert. It was held in a big auditorium, 2000 people and turned into a prime political event. At the end of this recital which had been of German Lieder by Schumann, he chose a song which ends “I greet you Germany from the bottom of my heart”. He belted that out as a statement of Germany being one place still. The whole audience erupted, they got the message bang on and without making a political demonstration of it they just let everyone know that, yes, this was in their hearts. I took that home and knew that German reunification was not dead but could happen one day. It might be against the wishes of the West at the moment, but there would be a pressure for it which was not going to go away.

AW: Moving?

DG: Yes, very moving it was, profoundly moving. Very hard for British people to understand I think, because we are not going to recreate the British Empire!

AW: How was living in Bonn?

DG: Very comfortable. I started off on the other side of the Rhine in a nice post War house and that meant crossing the Rhine everyday by ferry to get to work. The same journey that David Cornwell, or John le Carré as he became, was making before I arrived. Very sadly from my point of view, he'd left the Embassy before I got there so I never actually knew him, but his presence was there and after that, of course, "A Small Town in Germany" came out just about the same time that I got there so his name was everywhere and I could picture him sitting on that ferry writing his stories.

AW: And did you come back home after this posting?

Western European Department, FCO, 1969-72

DG: I came back to London in 1969 for three years to work in Western European Department, on the German desk which was an inspired move on the Foreign Office's part. For once I felt like a round peg in a round hole. I was a First Secretary. Domestically, we were settling down to married life, just had our first son and settling in to this house which we'd bought four years previously but hadn't really lived in. It was a time of getting to know the Foreign Office better and understanding the politics.

AW: Did you have good colleagues in the Office?

DG: I have to say as a general proposition that throughout my time in the Office I had nice as well as able colleagues virtually everywhere. It was, I think it still is, a very nice organisation. With odd exceptions we were all pulling together.

AW: What issues were you dealing with in that period?

DG: Funnily enough the most important issue that arose at that time was not in my general German role but in Berlin again. The Berlin Desk Officer was sitting next to me and she hadn't been to Berlin and didn't know all the background. So I was able to step in and help from time to time. We worked together on what became a very important issue, the negotiation of the Berlin Agreement of 1971 which was what really quietened everything down in Berlin from then on and until the Wall came down there wasn't another Berlin crisis. Those negotiations were very thorough and exhausting, I was quite glad I wasn't directly involved in them, but we were having to comment on what our negotiators were doing in the Bonn Group. If anybody really wants to know what was going on they must buy Christopher

Audland's book "Right Place, Right Time, Quadripartite Talks in Berlin", (pages 195-218). It's all there.

What he didn't record, because I was here and he was there, and his colleagues in the Bonn Group had the bit between their teeth and were galloping in the direction they wanted to go, was that from time to time we, in London, had to pull back the reins a bit because our people in Bonn were galloping too fast. Their feeling was that we must have an agreement and that if the Russians wanted something which we might not have wanted we might have to give it because it made the thing easier. It's quite difficult when the horse is galloping to say "I don't want to give that away". At one point we sent them a telegram about the 39 articles, or we thought the 39 defects, in the text they were working on, and we managed to get some of those changed but given that the French and the Americans and the Germans themselves were all pushing in the same direction ... But it was stimulating.

AW: In your notes during this period you refer to the Berlin Air Corridors?

DG: These are difficult areas relating to my superiors in the Foreign Office, one shouldn't speak ill of one's bosses, I know. As I mentioned, I was sitting next to the Berlin Desk Officer. The Russians suddenly probed our defences and they announced early one evening that they were sending a flight across one of the Berlin Corridors at a height which we had all agreed was our height and therefore our planes would have to divert. The Russians were trying to see if we would react. My immediate reaction was to say "No, we are going to fly at our normal altitudes regardless". I told my boss, the Assistant in the department, and he told his boss, the Head of the department. I think it was a Friday evening and the boss said that we couldn't do this as it was night time and it would be dangerous for our pilots. I did an unforgiveable thing. Because of the geography of the department, my office at WED was just across the corridor from the Under Secretary's Office, Thomas Brimelow, later PUS. I had quite a lot to do with Tom Brimelow who I knew from Germany, we knew each other as cold warriors. He was not at all frightened of Russians. I caught him in the corridor and told him what had happened and that I thought we should react. And he said that of course we should react. I said there was a bit of uncertainty about that and he asked me to let him know the details. So I did and he went and talked to Alec Douglas Home direct who talked to the American Embassy and who said they hoped we would do something. Alec Douglas Home said that we would and so, just like that, the RAF were told to scramble and it was done. I don't think my immediate bosses even knew it had happened.

AW: Did those three years go quite quickly?

DG: Yes, there was a lot going on.

First Secretary and Head of Chancery, Cairo, 1972-75

AW: And how did the posting to Cairo come about?

DG: At the end of those three years I was summoned to Personnel Department and told that they were posting me to Cairo. I said that I thought we had had an agreement that I wouldn't go to an Arabic speaking country. They said, yes, but nevertheless it was an important post and they wanted me to do it. I remember them saying at the time that they were not asking me, they were telling me. So I got on my high horse and said I didn't want to be treated in this way and got home that evening prepared to stand firm on it. The Foreign Office, in those days, worked properly I think, I don't know if it still does, and the Head of Personnel Department, no less, telephoned me at home that evening and said that he gathered I'd had a bit of a bust up with so and so. He was sorry about that but he really did want me to do this job and asked me to come in the next day to talk to him. Well, you can't resist an invitation like that, so I went in. Derek Day was the Head of Department then, he was a very good man, apart from being a teetotaller! He talked me into it simply by explaining that it was an important job, they had to fill it in a hurry because the previous Head of Chancery in Cairo was being called back to become a Private Secretary, it was John Coles, later head of the Foreign Office, and then he slipped in the killer blow "You won't have to speak Arabic" so our pact was, in effect, still intact because everybody there would want to speak English. This turned out to be absolutely right. I tried occasionally to speak Arabic but I hardly used it.

AW: What did you find when you arrived?

DG: I had been warned before I left, because it had trickled back to London, that morale in the Embassy was not good. The Foreign Office Security Department were worried about this because the East Germans and Russians were very active in Cairo and virtually ran the show and they feared the junior members of the Embassy particularly being got at, and I was told my first job was to raise morale and make sure that junior staff were not tempted. I took that as my basic guide and when I arrived there and asked around a bit, I decided that the best thing to do was to give the junior members of the Embassy something to do to take their minds off their loneliness. My wife April was a very theatrical person, she'd acted a lot, and

her instincts were all in the same direction mine were moving in and I asked her to set up an Embassy theatre group which was entirely in tune with Embassy activities generally. There was nothing like that going on in Cairo at the time, it was all very serious. So she set to, and found many people who were pleased with this idea and joined in and by Christmas we had put on our first Embassy revue, which, again, was a fairly normal Embassy event, it just hadn't been done in Cairo. That got everyone together and interested in the idea and from there April put on our first play "The Importance of Being Earnest" and the thing was launched. The Embassy Players, as we called ourselves, sailed merrily on for the next three years until I left. I think it achieved its objective; it cheered people up and gave them lots to do. All of this was encouraged by our wonderful Ambassador and his wife.

AW: Who was that?

DG: Philip and Libby Adams by then, they were a model Ambassador and wife and thoroughly supportive of anything that got things going. Libby used to lend bits of clothing for the pantomime.

So that was my main task achieved and then the war broke out so that was another aspect of life that one had to pay attention to! Somehow the fact that we were all acting together made it easier to discuss what was going on, report back and my two immediate juniors in the Chancery were fully paid-up members of the Embassy Players.

AW: What was the impact of the war on life? In your notes you mention bombing?

DG: There were one or two bombing raids, nothing major, but the sirens went, bombs were dropped and we went down into our cellars. The RAF kindly flew in special rations for us. There was the feeling of war without any of the bad by-products.

AW: And it ended quickly? And then was there much fall out afterwards or did life return to normal?

DG: It lasted three weeks but life wasn't exactly normal. What the whole thing was about was Sadat, who had followed on from Nasser, had decided he must restore Egyptian morale which had been shattered by the Six Day War. He knew he had to do something about Israel. He devised this amazingly successful plan to attack the Israelis who were embedded on the far side of the Suez Canal. He found a way of getting across the Canal and breaking through Israel's so-called Bar Lev line which the Israelis had just assumed was impossible. You have

to really hand it to Sadat, the Bar Lev line was really just sand and once the Egyptians had pushed across the river they brought in high pressure water cannon which dissolved the defences. Because it was Yom Kippur, the Israelis couldn't easily forgive that. The Egyptian army poured across and before they knew it they were half way across Sinai. We in the Embassy were trying to keep up. We didn't know this war was going to happen and the Foreign Office was completely wrong-footed, the same as everybody else.

After a fortnight Kissinger came in and instigated his shuttle diplomacy for the first time and sorted it out and stopped the Israelis from destroying the Egyptian Army, which they could have done by then. It was an object lesson on how to end wars and how to plan wars. It didn't have an exit strategy exactly but Kissinger was able to come in and work his magic because there was a kind of understanding on all sides that the Israelis didn't absolutely need to destroy the whole Egyptian army, and the Egyptians had salvaged their pride so they didn't need to press on and prove any more points. The Egyptian army withdrew and the Israeli army didn't push forward and eventually Sinai was handed back and a peace agreement was negotiated. Having restored pride, everybody wanted things normalised so almost overnight when the war was over, we found most of the restrictions which we had been operating under, were lifted. We hadn't been able to travel anywhere or speak to any Egyptians because they hadn't been able to speak to us, and suddenly it was back to normal life.

AW: Did you make Egyptian friends?

DG: Yes, after that it became easy and they wanted to make friends with us and one realised what time had been wasted by not being able to do this in the first two years we'd been there, so we celebrated by driving up the Nile all the way to Aswan, the first western visitors there for many years. Wherever we stopped en route small boys appeared from nowhere, rushing around the car saying "Baksheesh, Baksheesh". They'd been practising it all their lives but never had anybody to ask before! By then we were able to travel so the end of the tour was much more enjoyable than the beginning.

AW: And your living conditions?

DG: The living conditions were fine. There we did have a colonial mansion, one which Donald Maclean had lived in when he was in Cairo. So we heard all the stories about that time too, he had pushed grand pianos out of the windows and that sort of thing! Maclean was

evidently a riotous sort of person. It was a Cairo we didn't know at all as we were surrounded by secret police and all that.

AW: Yes, were you very aware of all the East Germans and the Russians you had been warned about?

DG: Yes we were. Shortly after I arrived somebody was listening in to radio frequencies and they heard unmistakably English voices talking and it was someone in my house. So they rang us and said that someone was talking, I told them to come and have a look and they came and searched around and found a device in the bookshelf which had been broadcasting everything going on for some time. We weren't sure if it was East German, Russian or Egyptian but we all knew we were bugged so we were pretty discreet. It was a reality but it upset people who were not used to it, wives particularly got fed up with it. Coming from Bonn and dealing with the Russians, somehow we were more used to it.

AW: Yes, you had already met them. And it looks like you are about to go back and meet them again?

Political Adviser and Head of Chancery, Berlin, 1976-79

DG: Yes, I went on from there to another logical posting, Berlin. I was Political Adviser to the General Officer Commanding the British Military Government because we were governing the British Sector at the time. I had two titles, the more important one was Political Adviser which was external and the Head of Chancery was internal. Externally, I was advising on dealing with the Russians and so on and I had a whale of a time in Berlin because I was able to deal with anybody that I wanted to. I wasn't Head of Mission but the Political Adviser did have a real status so I could call on anybody I liked and got to know the governing Mayor of Berlin at the time quite well. Because I could speak German better than my Head of Mission, he was happy for me to do most of that.

AW: Who was the Head of Mission?

DG: A man called Francis MacGinnis.

AW: Rudolf Hess is still in Spandau Prison?

DG: Yes, and the prison lay in the British Sector. I was responsible, ultimately, for the prison and its inmates. So I went to meet Hess. I'm afraid I had a habit after visiting that

chap in Bahrain of visiting prisons. I thought if I was responsible for this man that I'd better see what he was doing. I arranged to go and see him. Of course everything was quadripartite so the Russians, American and French all had to be informed and consulted but they couldn't see any reason why I shouldn't, couldn't go.

It was curiously unexciting. There was this funny little man with cropped hair, rather like a sub postmaster I thought. When I entered his cell, he stood up and clicked his heels acknowledging a superior authority and then we just talked. We didn't speak about anything controversial. I'd been told already but realised when I was there that his obsession was the moon. He had a vast map of the moon on his wall and he knew all the craters and canyons. So we found some fairly innocuous things to talk about and I asked about his conditions and if he was content, and he was. But the idea that this was the Deputy Fuhrer of the Germany that was going to conquer the world was ... There was a conspiracy theory that the man in Spandau wasn't Hess at all and that he had been substituted at some point between landing in Scotland and going to Spandau, and one had to wonder whether there mightn't be something in that! If he was a sort of changeling. I came back with an impression of as un-dangerous individual as could be who was a totally spent force.

Being the Political Adviser in Berlin, I was the principal interlocutor with the Russian Embassy so anything to do with the future of Berlin I would discuss with my counterpart in the East who luckily was a very agreeable, old school, Russian diplomat, Khotulev. Amazingly, his grandfather had been a senior officer in the Tsarist regime. Normally they didn't allow the old regime to percolate through. We had very civilised meetings always over lunch in the Russian Embassy, with caviar, vodka, things you would expect. It was choreographed, you went in, did a bit of serious business, I would complain to him about what the East Germans were up to, because they were always pushing their luck, and I said that he should keep these people under control otherwise they might cause an incident which would be unfortunate from both our points of view. He said that no, the East Germans were sovereign and he couldn't control them. We would fling it back and forwards like this and then he would complain about something the West Germans were doing: after all Berlin was the capital of the GDR and the West Germans were always pushing the other way. We would end at one all and then talked about other things and enjoyed our caviar.

AW: You mention a piece of the Wall?

DG: Yes, quite a big piece. I always believe in taking opportunities as they arise. There was a tendency on our side then to stand back where the East Germans were concerned. The East Germans were not ultimately in charge but we tended to think they were in de facto control and we didn't want to upset them because it could escalate. I took a rather more neo-imperialist line, perhaps because of my Indian upbringing. I said, "No, we are in charge and it's important from time to time to make the East Germans realise it". One of the first things I discovered when I arrived was that they were niggling away at something to do with the railways in West Berlin. We were in charge of the police so I instructed my Public Safety Officer to go out and stop the East Germans doing what they were doing. His eyes lit up and he said "Do you really mean that?" I said "Yes, go and do it". They hadn't been allowed to do something like this for a long time. So they happily went in and stopped the thing happening.

Some of the Wall had been rebuilt incorporating new technology. The top of the Wall consisted of circular tubes and if you tried to climb up the Wall, the tubes turned and you slipped back. One of these tubes had somehow become detached and rolled onto our side of the Wall. The question arose as to what we were to do about it. I said to our chaps to go and get it as it was on our side and they were not going to shoot us. Our people were up for it and picked it up and brought it back and I said that I would please like to have it in my garden. So we stuck it upright this time.

It was very enjoyable in many ways. I could commandeer tickets for any shows that I felt like, the opera and so on. I got to know some of the musicians, the singers.

AW: And you mentioned about film?

DG: One of our neighbours in Grunewald where we lived was a film producer, a very agreeable chap who was doing co-productions with Russians. I got to know him and chatted about things. He told me he was going off to Tehran to make a film about Iran with Russian backing and I asked him to let me know how he got on. It was in 1978 before the Revolution. He came back and he asked me over and said that he didn't know whether our people in Tehran were picking it up, but wandering around and talking to people as he was, he got an unmistakable feeling of a pre-revolutionary atmosphere, very edgy and that something was going on. A year later Iran turned upside down. We in the Foreign Office seemed to have no prior knowledge of this at all. Perhaps we were too busy cosyng up to the Shah and selling arms which seemed to be our main business in Iran at that time.

AW: And then in 1978 the Queen came to visit! How exciting!

DG: Oh yes. I had to orchestrate that visit. The centre piece was going to be her speech to the Berliners and we had to decide where and how, all those things. I decided that the Gedächtniskirche, the ruined church which had been left as a symbol of Nazi destruction, was the obvious place, rather than taking her to our Headquarters in the Olympic stadium. We recced the site and discovered you could walk in behind a couple of large pillars which shielded you from view until you came into sight and I thought I would like her to come through there and emerge onto the scene. Just a bit of stagecraft. And she did. The Berliners were not quite sure what to make of all of this. Berliners are Republican people. They held out longest against Hitler, he had to move his headquarters in order to get on top of them, they are not easily cowed by authority. The Queen represented the sort of authority they are a bit suspicious of. Nobody knew how they were going to react to this visit so it was a bit of a risk whatever one did. But we needn't have worried. When she appeared, a huge roar greeted her. Then she delivered her speech, which I had drafted for her and the Telegraph were kind enough to say afterwards that for once the Queen had actually said something! It was quite interesting trying to get the German and the English versions to tie up because translating can often produce quite different impacts. I wrote it in English, because obviously I wanted it to go onto the British media, but wanted to have a German punch that would carry it on their side as well. The centrepiece of the message which I put up in the hope that someone back in London would agree, was a commitment that the British Army would stay in Berlin for as long as necessary or until the German people were reunited. Slightly to my surprise, they kept it in and the only question then was translating the words. I'll have to recover it from somewhere; I think it was "Our troops will remain in Berlin till the divisions in Germany are healed". It was the healing that was the key word there. It doesn't quite go into German, you can't heal a division, they said. So we stuck in "wounds": "until the wounds of the division of Germany are healed". It went down quite well and my main pleasure was that it was accepted because it was going a bit further than anybody had really said up to that point. I think the Queen was quite pleased to have something to say too!

AW: How long was she in the city?

DG: A couple of days as guest of the Berlin Senate. There was a little sideshow going on. The Germans, like all people, like to give a Head of State a present and they spent some time talking to Buckingham Palace about what the Queen would like. I don't know if the Queen

ever says herself what she would like, but the Equerry said that what the Queen would really like was a horse. I expect they cleared their throats politely and said yes! They couldn't not, they had offered a present and that's what she wanted, so they had to find a horse and the horse had to be negotiated with the Equerry, Sir John Miller. I got a bit nervous that this might sour the relations engendered by the visit, but it all went off all right.

Prince Philip came and played a part. The Berlin Senate gave a big reception in the Charlottenberg Palace for the visitors. At the end of the party people were slow to leave. The Queen, Prince Philip, the Private Secretary and a few other people were standing at one end of this room and there was a little knot of people at the other end of the room. Prince Philip said to somebody, not me, quite loudly that they should get the other people out of there. I found someone to go and explain to him that it was the Governing Mayor of Berlin and his officials and as it was his palace they couldn't really be asked to leave.

AW: I know you were in Bonn previously, but did you find a big difference living in Germany the second time around?

DG: Well in Berlin you are in a little capsule, completely insulated from the outside world, a very colonial existence. Delightful people, Berliners, and I was sorry to leave and come home - a bit of a come down!

Head of Western European Department, FCO, 1979-82

AW: Back to Western European Department, but this time as Head?

DG: Very different being Head where you have to take direct responsibility for people and to deal with those above you, which is not what I enjoy doing. Actually I've had some very delightful bosses but in general ...

AW: And in Whitehall with Ministers and so on?

DG: Yes, the Foreign Secretary, at that point it was Lord Carrington and when senior Western European visitors came I would have to sit in, take notes and so on. That was always a joy because he was so easy to work for. But rather more significantly I did have to deal with Mrs Thatcher. I arrived in my job in March 1979, just the same time that she became Prime Minister, so we were both new to the job. I happened to be at one of the first parties she gave in Downing Street which was for a visiting German. I was invited along to be part of the hosting arrangements and it was the first time I'd done something like this. So

I arrived suitably early and she was already there with other officials. She spotted me over the other side of the room, came up to me and said “You’re Mr Gladstone?” I said yes I was and she then took me to meet the other people there and that set the tone for all our other meetings. She was a remarkable person in that way. Whatever she was doing, she would always be courteous, particularly for people working for her and she was punctilious in remembering who they were and where they came from. If they were her own staff she would know how their mothers were, if they were in hospital, anything like that. I met her on a number of occasions after that and it was always the same. That side of her I can’t praise highly enough. But she was kind of a split personality and when she moved out of the domestic sphere she became a different person.

It was amusing watching her dealing with her fellow Heads of Government and watching how they dealt with her. The Italian Prime Minister at that time was a very urbane chap called Signor Cossiga. Because he wasn’t the most important visitor in her life, the French, German and the Americans were the most important, she had a very relaxed session with him. I was taking notes for her and there was an Italian taking notes for the other side, otherwise it was just the four of us and I could observe her close to and watch the dynamics. It was fascinating seeing how S. Cossiga played her. He wasn’t remotely impressed by the “Iron Lady” and all that sort of thing. He just flirted with her. And she was totally powerless; she just had to respond in kind! It was a pretty banal conversation but it was very good for Anglo-Italian relations.

AW: Did you see her in tougher mode with others?

DG: She was in a different mode with the French and the Germans, yes. Helmut Schmidt was the German Chancellor at the time and I don’t know if people know anything about Helmut Schmidt anymore, but he was a great man and a charmer too. He used to take snuff and had this habit of taking snuff between his remarks and smiling. And she couldn’t deal with that either! He could wind her up and do more or less what he liked with her.

The French of course were rather different. Giscard d’Estaing was lordly and dealt with her in his way and they didn’t see eye to eye. And then along came François Mitterrand who famously declared that she had the lips of Marilyn Monroe and the eyes of Caligula. But he charmed her too.

AW: In the Western European Department at that time, it must have been quite complicated with the European work and all the people who were doing work on the EU?

DG: Yes, you're absolutely right. All the substance of the job was handled by other people and as my predecessor said rather ruefully "As Head of Western European Department, you are a sort of travel agent" fixing visits, arranging hotels and all that sort of thing which is rather true, it was to some extent rather boringly substance-less. I would stick my oar in when I felt I could, but I wasn't always invited to.

AW: And so what about these Franco-British Councils you mention in Bordeaux, Edinburgh and Avignon?

DG: Yes, well I thought that one thing I could do was to revive this Franco-British Council which had been established after a previous Head of State visit but then had been allowed to become defunct. There was nevertheless a sort of secretariat to keep the thing running so I chatted to the Secretary and discovered that he too would like to do something with the Council. I thought that as there was nothing much else going on with the French and we were always at loggerheads on EU matters, we should give it another whirl. I found some willing allies, there were some quite important members of the Council, people like Lord Forte and Lord Weidenfeld and we got agreement to get the thing going again. My Permanent Under-Secretary, Michael Palliser, was keen on the idea but we knew we had to get the Heads of Government involved, because it had to be done at that level if it was really going to achieve anything.

I decided the best thing to do was to set up a high-level conference which would focus people's minds and make them feel they had to attend. Because we were trying to get the French to cooperate, we decided it should be held in France in a nice Anglo-French historical venue. Bordeaux seemed the obvious place to do it. The French Embassy thought it was a good idea, the people in Bordeaux were consulted and they liked it and eventually everybody said it was a good idea and suddenly it was a *fait accompli*! Mrs Thatcher was told that this great conference was taking place and that she ought to go to it and although I think she was a bit suspicious she was, nevertheless, a bit tempted by spending a couple of days in Bordeaux and so the thing was launched. Despite forebodings it was not a failure. Everyone sat looking a bit wooden to start with but there were important people on both sides. I remember Robin Day quoting some French he remembered from school. Everybody had

some French story to tell and some on the French side reciprocated but they were generally rather less enthusiastic about it.

Then we came to the big dinner which was hosted by the French Prime Minister Monsieur Raymond Barre. Rodric Braithwaite, who was Head of Planning Department, had written Mrs Thatcher's speech which was a beautiful historical survey of Anglo-French relations drawing on obvious points of contact including Westminster Abbey being a totally Anglo-French building, and then Monsieur Barre rose to his feet and delivered a lecture on what the European Union was really about. Mrs Thatcher sat there with a slightly strained smile but nonetheless everybody went home feeling it had been quite good. We had to reciprocate, so we organised the next one in Edinburgh which was rather more enjoyable because we were in charge and could slant things our way. Mrs Thatcher came again and was charming. After I'd left WED, I had set in motion a third one in Avignon which was quite historic if for only one reason because she decided that she would sign the memorandum on the Channel Tunnel. Being Avignon we were afraid that the French farmers might come and blockade the meeting but they came and all they wanted was to shake her hand.

AW: So the Council you revived ...

DG: It did three conferences. How useful you can say it was I don't know, but if diplomacy is about bringing people together then it did achieve something.

AW: In your notes you mention the Holy See?

DG: Yes the Holy See was one of the substantive things I did. But having mentioned Rudolf Hess, I would like to go back to one of the first things that happened when I came back from Berlin. I was briefed about the "Free Hess" campaign. There was a very active group campaigning for the freedom of Hess and it was led by Airey Neave, the Conservative MP who was close to Mrs Thatcher and who had a very eminent war record and so he had impeccable credentials. The campaign was seeking the release of Hess but my predecessor had found it difficult to deal with it. They didn't want to upset Airey Neave because he was an important politician but they couldn't give him any hope because they knew, as well as I did, that Hess was never going to be free. The Russians wouldn't allow it, the French actually wouldn't allow it and the Americans weren't very enthusiastic and we couldn't do it by ourselves. But the can had been kicked down the road for years; people said they would try, Airey Neave put down motions in Parliament, it was all a bit tiresome because it was

wasting time and not getting anywhere. I don't like those sort of situations so I decided I would take the bull by the horns and try and knock it out of the way. As luck would have it, and as I'd been warned, Airey Neave did ring me quite soon after I'd arrived. He spent a full ten minutes explaining to the new Head of Western European Department that it was absolutely vital that the Foreign Office should use all of its best efforts to free Rudolf Hess. I heard him out and said very politely "Mr Neave, I am well aware of your record and you are fully entitled to pursue this cause, it is very admirable, but I must tell you now that there is no hope whatever of Hess ever being freed. I've just come back from Berlin, I know, and I have met him, I have met all the people there and I know the Russian, French and American views. They would all have to agree to this and they are never going to agree and the British Government is not going to gain anything by pursuing something which is never going to succeed. I hate to say this but it will just not work." There was silence at the other end of the line and he then just accepted it. Shortly afterwards he was assassinated by the IRA and what a real tragedy that was.

Another old bone of contention that I picked up in Western European Department picked up by one predecessor after another was the fact that our diplomatic relations with the Holy See had been at a low level ever since the Reformation. We had relegated ourselves to second tier. We didn't have an Ambassador to the Holy See, we had a Minister and that meant that we were not at the top table for all the important discussions that went on. We had put up with that as not being of vital British interest and because the House of Commons were always opposed to trying to do anything about this situation and perhaps raising hackles in the Church of England. "Let sleeping dogs lie" was the Foreign Office line. My predecessor David Goodall had wanted to do something about it but he was a Roman Catholic himself and thereby debarred from wading in, in case he was accused of special pleading. He raised this with me and I just decided on first principles that I wanted to do something about it.

Not long afterwards Pope John Paul II became Pope and started cutting a dash and becoming a world statesman. There was talk of him visiting Britain. I passed my views up the line saying that we couldn't have a visit from the Pope without having full diplomatic relations with the Holy See. Silence. There was a clear lack of enthusiasm for grasping this nettle and somehow hoping it would just go away. The Pope might not come, or something! Getting no joy from my immediate superiors I raised the subject with the PUS. I was seeing him quite a lot and he had taken up the habit of visiting posts overseas and found I was doing the same to my European posts so he asked if he could come along with me sometimes. So we

went to three or four posts like that and got to know each other. In chatting I said that I had got this idea but that it wasn't meeting much enthusiasm and did he think it was a good idea to pursue? He said "Yes, I very much do and if you are not getting much joy, please put the papers straight through to me". Perhaps I shouldn't record this but that is what happened. I wrote submissions direct and with his authority I opened negotiations with the Papal Pro-Nuncio in London and, like dealing with the American Embassy early on, I had a very civilised interlocutor, Monsignor Bruno Heim with a very nice house on Wimbledon Common. Because I couldn't be seen to be taking the initiative all of this had to be in his house and he had to be continually entertaining me. So I had a succession of lovely meals there and as you can imagine, he had a very good cellar! I think it was one of the most agreeable things I did in the Foreign Office.

We knew the Pope was coming in June of 1982 and we timed it so that our negotiations would be completed by then. We couldn't know precisely because Parliament had to be consulted, but we got out our joint submissions in time. Mrs Thatcher agreed, we took soundings in the House of Commons, nobody said anything, so it was safe to go ahead in time for the Papal Visit. The deed was done and for the first time we established a proper Embassy, with an Ambassador, and now it's automatic. And then I left WED.

AW: So that was the last thing that happened. You mentioned in your notes that there was the Italian earthquake during your period?

DG: Yes this is way off beam and I fear you may get the impression that I can't stop doing things. I do like doing things and I like solving problems. In November '81 there was a great earthquake in the hills overlooking Naples. It made quite a splash at the time. There was a lot of destruction and lots of sympathy pouring out from the British press, media and public opinion. It was obviously a disaster in Western Europe and therefore, as far as I was concerned, it fell in my orbit. I felt from first principles that Britain ought to do something to help. There was obviously money going through private charities but I thought in solidarity with the European Union and all the rest of it that we ought to be doing something more governmental. I started asking around and was rapidly told that we couldn't give aid to a developed country so the ODA was out of the frame to do anything. I asked up the line, as I had done with the Vatican, as to whether there would be support for pushing at higher levels for things to be done. No. There was no enthusiasm at all and the message came down that I was on my own.

There were two things we were going to need. One was a pot of money and two was someone to do the work. The second part was easy because knowing the Army as I did, I thought they would be glad of the excuse to roll their sleeves up and go and do something useful. But they had to be paid and the MoD had no funds for this kind of thing. I asked around the office and by great good fortune the Rhodesia Department had put in the year before for something that was supposed to happen but then couldn't happen, so they had money sitting there unspent and they agreed to release it. Half a million pounds and it was enough to do something with.

So then I got onto the MoD and we decided that what was needed was to leave the local people with something that would last them a few years. The MoD thought their Sappers could put up prefabs and that is what happened. The other thing was that all the goods had to be delivered to Italy so I approached our Embassy in Rome to see if they could help with the onward transmission down to Naples, but no. Again, there was no enthusiasm whatsoever. I got the feeling that people didn't want to be associated with something that might not work. Anything could go wrong and it was much more likely to be noticed if it went wrong than if it went right. But luck was on my side. The Consul General in Naples at the time was a friend of mine from Bonn days; he was an Army man too. He was thrilled when I said I was going to route everything through him. The port of Naples became the trans-shipment place and he took over the entire local organisation.

We worked out a scheme for putting up a community centre and a school in two villages which had been destroyed, the Army sappers moved in and collected the materials from the stores at the port and took it up to the hills and put the buildings up. The thing was done in a relatively short period of time and I received a medal, the freedom of the village of Solofra! I went out to visit when it was all over and see what had happened, rather nice to be received like that.

AW: Did all the powers that be then take credit for it?

DG: No, I'm not sure they knew about it! I thought this was something best dealt with at my level.

AW: In your notes you mention Hermann Axen?

DG: Yes, this was when I was Head of Western European Department and feeling terribly fidgety and wanting something to do. I decided that as we'd never had any real relations with

the GDR and for good legal reasons we didn't overdo that, nevertheless the GDR was an important country in the Eastern Bloc and there was no reason why we shouldn't pay them some attention. I decided that we should invite one of their leading politicians over, and not only a politician but a member of the Politburo who, as far as I knew, was the only Jewish Politburo member in the Soviet Bloc, a very interesting character. We duly invited Herr Axen to Britain. We gave him the usual COI sponsored tour of things, we took him to a factory in the Midlands to show him the wonders of British engineering, I think it was Guest Keen Nettlefold. We wandered around the great old building and I heard him muttering under his breath that it was like something out of the Middle Ages! We retrieved ourselves by taking him to see Cats, which was on at the time. At the interval I had arranged to have the VIP suite and took him along there. We went in through one door and through the opposite door in came Princess Margaret with her ladies in waiting and one or two friends. I wondered if we were going to re-enact the scene at the Charlottenberg Palace with one lot here and another there, but I thought, no, so I went up to her and explained what I was doing and who my guest was and she said she would like to meet him! It was quite clear that he wanted to meet her and so I hope it made both their days! It was slightly surreal.

AW: This is Tuesday 22nd September and David Gladstone is resuming his recollections of his diplomatic career with Abbey Wright. At our last session we had come to the end of your time as Head of Western European Department, and you are off to Marseille as Consul General, how did that come about? Was that another one where you were told where you were going, or did you pick it?

Consul General, Marseille, 1983-87

DG: The reverse option. Normally you were called into Personnel Department and told you were going there or, if you were lucky, there might be an option, there or there. But when I finished with Western European Department the Office didn't know what to do with me at all. They tried to send me to the Department of Trade and Industry but they wouldn't have me because I had such a bad report from my bosses.

They sent me on an Economics course in Oxford which I greatly enjoyed.

AW: How long did that last?

DG: That was a month at Merton College, I can fully recommend it. Except that I spent a month in the summer listening to the clock at Magdalen chime every single hour through the night!

I came back to London after that. Personnel Department reeled off various options; two or three of them were Head of Chancery somewhere. I said that I'd been Head of Chancery and would rather go on somewhere up, I think there was Ambassador to Iceland, which I was quite taken by because I like Iceland, but they also offered, at the end of the line in a throw away fashion, "Of course there is Marseille". April, who was allowed to come with me on this occasion, pricked up her ears and we both said simultaneously that that sounded good. The poor Personnel person then tried to back track saying it wasn't really a serious suggestion! We weren't meant to take that card. But we went home and slept on it and we could both see a lot of sense in it. I didn't want to go on being Head of Chancery forever, I wasn't clearly going to get a significant Ambassadorship, and I don't like being "under other people" so the attraction of this job was that I would be out on my own and running my own affairs and, what was more, I would be able to get my hands dirty with commerce, consular and number of aspects of diplomatic work which I hadn't actually handled so far. After a certain amount of argument they gave way and I was allowed to go and I didn't look back for four years, it was a dream posting.

I got a bit of everything as I'd hoped, including meeting a lot of interesting people, living in the South of France, indulging in the affairs of Monaco.

AW: That was the Consulate closest to Monaco?

DG: Yes indeed. There was a bit of sadness about Monaco because not long before I was posted out there Prince Charles had got married to Lady Diana Spencer and there had been a great gathering of important people in London to celebrate it. Heads of Department in the Office helped to entertain them. I went to a reception which contained Prince Rainier and Princess Grace, so April and I met the Princess and chatted to her and got on well enough. When I knew we were going to Marseille, I thought "Yippee" and that we would get to know Princess Grace properly. Only of course, she died just before we arrived. It was tragic for all kinds of reasons and all the time I was there people were speculating on what had happened, they probably always will. But for April and myself that was one great sadness and a different proposition from what it might have been. It was fascinating in all kinds of ways but not quite what I'd hoped.

A little later on, when I got there, there was a story which I will include now. The Queen's Birthday Party is celebrated all over the world by Embassies and nowhere more so than in places where there is a heavy concentration of British expats. The South of France was obviously one such place and it had Queen's Birthday Parties all along the coast. Monaco, being Monaco, always went to town, and was the scene for a very lavish reception. Her Majesty's Consul General was expected to go and preside over it. Previously in Monaco, it had been handled by our Consulate in Nice but that had closed before I went, and that is one thing which had made the job more attractive in fact, a bigger area to cover and Monaco part of my responsibilities. Shortly before the Queen's Birthday Party, Mrs Thatcher had had the bright idea of giving the vote to British expats living in places like the South of France. She thought they would all be likely to vote Conservative. I went along to the occasion and as this vote was news I announced to the assembled throng that this had been decided and I was a happy bringer of the tidings as it meant that, in the best traditions of democracy, they would all now have the chance to throw out the government of the day if they wished. There was a stunned silence and at the end of it a self-appointed guardian of British diplomatic etiquette who had attached herself to the court in Monaco took both April and myself aside and told us that I simply couldn't say anything like that. I realised that in Monaco you were not allowed to suggest that Thatcher might be subject to the rules of democracy but it was not a lesson I was going to learn I'm afraid.

AW: So that was Monaco. You also mention in your notes another part which I suppose we could describe as glamorous, and that is the Cannes Film Festival?

DG: That was all very upbeat. I got to know Cannes very well, it became a second home to me and I used to spend a lot of time there.

AW: Did you have a sub office there?

DG: We had an Hon Consul in Nice and he was often in Cannes and there was a very well established, very agreeable British community, going back to Victorian days, British firms and names. So I soon got established there and the Cannes Film Festival was on as soon as I got there so I pitched in as I realised one of my responsibilities was to look after the British contingent. April and I had always loved film and knew a bit about it. There was no difficulty in getting involved and I found that the British film people were very glad that Her Majesty's Representative was interested in their affairs and I was able, by the end of my time there because I'd got to know the Mayor, to arrange for us to have our party on the beach

during the Festival. It doesn't sound much but it had never been done before and other contingents were cross and wondering how on earth the British got this honour!

I also got a good insight into the ways of the judging of the Cannes Film Festival and played a little part in getting the British entry in 1986 noticed. 1986 was designated British Film Year and we all thought it would be a good idea if for once a British film was selected as the main film. Dickie Attenborough was the big cheese in the British Contingent and there were others like David Puttnam who we used to meet occasionally. So we allocated duty between us and I was told my job was to write to Prince Charles's office because Prince Charles was Patron of British Film Year and if he was going to come with Princess Diana we felt the organisers might be more inclined to push the boat out for a British film generally.

The film people went off and did their things and decided the most promising British film was *The Mission*. Jeremy Irons came out. I wrote to Prince Charles's office and never heard anything. Eventually I asked round the back way what had happened and was told that it was thought too frivolous a suggestion and wasn't worth replying to. So I had to relay that back to the film people. There were some long faces but Dickie Attenborough said he understood but to leave it to him, he knew Prince Charles. Not long after this I got a nice letter from the Palace saying that Prince Charles was grateful for the suggestion and would indeed come and attend the next year.

So he came, with Princess Diana, piloting his own aircraft. It was quite a surreal day. Princess Diana came down the steps of the aircraft first. I was at the bottom of the steps to receive her. Some of her people had come off first and were standing further along. She walked straight past me and joined her people. Then Prince Charles came down the steps and came straight up to me and said he had to give a speech at the dinner in honour of Alec Guinness after all the other famous people had spoken. He'd been given a speech by the department responsible, The Department of Trade and Industry, but he didn't think he could use it because it was all about statistics. He asked if he could give it to me to brush it up a bit. I looked at it but it would have meant rewriting the whole thing and as I didn't know his style and there was no time available I had to say that I was terribly sorry but couldn't. He took it back and when dinner came he sat listening to all these other people, Peter Ustinov, Clive James, just about everybody you could think of, making little notes on his napkin. When his turn came at the end he ostentatiously put aside the official speech he'd been given

and spoke off the cuff from his notes and I must say it was an amazing performance and he was not at all disgraced by the company.

But Princess Diana didn't speak all day. She didn't smile, she didn't talk to her French hosts and it was really quite embarrassing. At the end of the day when they left, one or two of her people said that there was a reason for it but they wouldn't go into it then. After they had all gone back I got a message to say that I should understand that she had been very depressed because her favourite bodyguard had been killed the week before in a motor cycle accident. So one felt one could understand that. By now we'd moved into 1987 quite near the end of their marriage.

AW: You mention writers – were they to do with the film festivals or were they writers living there?

DG: No they were living there. We had Lawrence Durrell, Angus Wilson, Graham Greene and Anthony Burgess among others.

AW: Were they good at turning out and supporting British events?

DG: No, not at all. It was more interesting for me. When I arrived there Graham Greene was involved in a battle with the Mayor of Nice and had just launched a pamphlet called "J'accuse" in which he accused the Mayor of Nice of a number of things that people locally knew to be true. I immediately thought that my consular duties were to protect British citizens there and must at least offer to do what I could. I don't suppose he needed it. He invited me to meet; he didn't need my protection but would like to chat anyway. He had his own connections with the Foreign Office. So that led to a relationship.

Burgess was living in Monaco, they were actually both Catholic, but there was a kind of deep rivalry. I don't think Graham Greene saw the rivalry but Burgess saw Greene as a rival and very ostentatiously tried to profile himself as his equal. I rather took against Burgess for two reasons. One, I couldn't get to meet him because he was protected by his Italian wife who refused all requests for meetings and wouldn't let me through but also because he had made himself the unofficial, unpaid, spokesman for the Royal Family in Monaco which I didn't think was really his job and certainly not something that Graham Greene would ever thought of doing!

AW: On the consular work, there was a very bad crash when you were there?

DG: Yes in 1985 a British coach with a party of school children going to the South West of France and the driver had a heart attack or fell asleep at the wheel and there was a very bad crash with fatalities. By an extraordinary chance I was over in the western end of my area, a long way from Marseille. If I'd been in Marseille it would have taken me a long time to get there but I happened to be travelling in that area. This was the era before mobile phones and I couldn't be got at just like that, but I had checked in to my hotel and asked if there was anything going on and they said Yes that there was news of this crash. As it happened it was just down the road from where I was so I was able to be one of the first people there. We had this extraordinary operation where the French came in and dealt with it, they flew the casualties off by helicopter to four local hospitals where they were incredibly well treated but there were seven fatalities. This is where I realised what consular duties come to because all the families had got on aeroplanes and flown out to Toulouse and came to where I was and we set up a base there. It fell to me to tell the parents that their children had died. It was not something one wishes for. I know in the Army it happens but it doesn't often happen in the Foreign Service. In a funny way I was grateful for the experience, it made it all very real and one could try and make things easier for the families.

The other thing I felt obliged to do was call a press conference because there was a lot of press interest down there and I had to do it in French, so it was a good test. I suppose I'd been sort of trained for it but until it happens you don't quite know how it will be.

AW: The awful coach crash aside, was the consular side of the work very onerous or were people quite well behaved, visitors not getting into too much trouble?

DG: Very predictable trouble, losing passports, losing money, being mugged, that sort of thing. We were told by the Foreign Office not to lean over backwards too much, that was the era of Mrs Thatcher and standing on your own two feet.

AW: What sort of staff did you have for dealing with it all?

DG: I had a Deputy, very lucky in those days to have a Deputy Consul General, that's gone long ago. I had an English lady consular officer who was very good and a French locally employed commercial officer. That was it and the Hon Consul.

AW: The other thing you mention in your notes was the rise of Monsieur Le Pen and the rise of the National Front?

DG: When I took the job on I had in mind the variety of work there might be. I had thought consular work, commercial work, cultural work but I suspected there might be some interesting political work to be done and sure enough after I arrived I realised that the National Front was rising and it was rising in Marseille and all around there so I had a wonderful ringside seat of the players and first hand accounts of what it was all about and I became very interested in the question of migration.

Marseille was the place where the Algerians all came to after the Algerian War. When the pieds-noirs retreated they were followed by what one would call an avenging horde in today's parlance. They decided to make their homes in what they had been encouraged to see as their parent country, France, so the French couldn't stop them. Most of them came to Marseille and made their homes in what became known as the Arab Quarter and which was the old centre of Marseille from which the French themselves then evacuated. This was fascinating for me because all sorts of politics were being generated by this and I was right in the middle of it. I knew the Mayor, the people running the immigration side of things and particularly the question of housing became rather key. They were building large council blocks in which, to start with, they were trying to mix Algerians and French. They could only go so far because the more Algerians they put in the more French moved out and they ended up as single culture.

More interesting still, just along the coast from Marseille to the west there was a blank space on the map. I was chatting to one of my contacts in the town hall who was trying to manage all these immigration problems, almost single-handedly because nobody wanted to do it. He was delighted to find someone who was interested in what he was doing and he said "Come with me, and I'll show you". We drove along the coast to this blank space and discovered a town there full of Algerians which had attached itself to a factory making tiles. The work force was almost entirely Algerian, they were paid low wages and given no recognition in terms of schooling or infrastructure and they had come over from Algiers and were absorbed. They made their houses, villages and towns around them, taking the materials from the factories, they tapped the local water supplies, they tapped the electricity pylons, and the whole thing was totally unacknowledged by the powers that be, it just didn't exist. My friend in the town hall said they didn't know how to move on from this, they had got to somehow recognise it was happening but they didn't know how. He was syphoning off people from this place into the high rise blocks which were being vacated by the French. The Marseillais felt they were being forced out, but it was only economic forcing, they didn't have to go, they

could have coexisted with the Algerians. All this was feeding the National Front as resentments were building up and I wrote four little pieces describing what was going on. It would be quite interesting to read them now because this was immigration of a particular kind and we are now ... The problems were there as they are in this country today. So my experience in Marseille was very valuable, very interesting.

AW: So your four years must have spun along?

DG: Yes indeed. I should also mention that we had a wine tasting or two, trying to sell British wine! And promoting British goods. My friends tried to not smile too much at the wine.

And on the commercial side I should also mention that just down the road from Marseille is Marignane where Aerospatiale make their helicopters. Helicopters became a big issue at the end of my time with Michael Heseltine and Westland and so on, another sort of political storm with Marseille somewhere near the epicentre. Got lots of helicopter rides out of that which I can't say I was terribly pleased about! There was one destined for the Gulf which had gold taps and gold everything!

AW: From there you were off to Sri Lanka, did you come home or was that all done on the spot?

High Commissioner, Sri Lanka, 1987-91

DG: It was all done on the spot. I didn't know what to expect after Marseille after Personnel Department had tried to stop me in the first place saying "It doesn't lead anywhere, being out in the sticks in a consular post is a dead end". So I was quite surprised when Personnel Department said that they were thinking of sending me to Sri Lanka. I said "Why not?" I was born in India, one reason for going back, but also the fact that I was actually going to get an Embassy after all was rather pleasing, so I didn't take much persuading and we went straight from there to there.

AW: So what did you find on arrival?

DG: Well April was in England so I went on ahead. Our main problem was what to do with our cat. The cat was in Marseille with me and it was quite difficult to arrange to get her from Marseille to Sri Lanka. She had to be shipped back to Heathrow and, in effect, had to go through quarantine there and then be put on another aeroplane and flown out to Sri Lanka. It

went off seamlessly and I was there when she arrived but, as I relate in my memoirs, this was a very bad augury at my arrival because almost immediately after the cat was unpacked she escaped from the house into the garden next door and immediately caught hepatitis. I guess she had no immunity. So the first thing that happened to me was that I lost my cat and April wasn't even there, she had to come out and learn about it on arrival.

That aside, it was one of those strange postings where you have to hit the ground running and you can't stop. It was put to me by Personnel Department as a quiet colonial backwater and they said that I wouldn't be much tested and my predecessors had spent their time opening flower shows and playing golf. I was not sure about that, but thought "Let's see". They mentioned that an interesting situation was developing up in the north so there would be a bit of politics to do.

When I arrived it was very political and rush, rush, rush. The moment I arrived the President of Sri Lanka called me in before I had almost got off the plane. I was rushed through presenting my credentials and he told me what he wanted me to do, which was to persuade the British Government to back the rather risky thing which he was doing, which was bringing the Indians in to police the Tamils while he looked after yet another problem down in the south. So from day one, I was in the middle of things because they included me as almost part of their inner team. In fact I was seeing papers before his own cabinet saw them. The only person who was closer to all of this was the Indian High Commissioner who held very special status there.

So from the outset it was strange and it just went on getting stranger. Far from being a quiet colonial backwater ... the colonial side was actually quite quiet because they were not making a fuss about the British past but the politics, terrorism and insurrections were just absorbing from day one. There was mayhem, bloodshed, Indians coming in, Tamils doing this, the Sinhalese killing each other and I got involved from the beginning. The President had involved me but then the more I got to know the people there was the awful dilemma of do you stay aloof as a proper diplomat should? Or do you not notice that there is a lot of killing going on, much of it by Government and its proxy forces? And the Government is talking to you nicely about things and getting you to back them in this and that. I couldn't always agree. It was all right when that President was there, the one I met on arrival, so for the first eighteen months I got by. He was a very cool, complex character. He wasn't in the business of killing lots of people, although he was doing very naughty things in other ways

which set lots of bad things going. So I was critical of him but for eighteen months I was able to hold on.

The situation went right out of hand after that in 1989, the year of the fall of the Berlin Wall, the government put down the main rebellion and there was appalling loss of life in all sorts of very gruesome ways and all of which I knew about because I was in the thick of it and by then had lots of friends who were themselves trying to do something about it hoping that someone in the outside world would take notice and come to their aid. I'm afraid that I couldn't stay aloof so I tried to persuade the Government to moderate their killings, pull back and try and find more constructive ways of doing things, which failed, so I tried going over their heads, as it were, and speaking in public, and found that editors of local newspapers were unable to print what they wanted to print because of censorship, but they found that if they quoted me they could get it out, so they did. That initiated a kind of downward spiral which ended in me being unceremoniously booted out in 1991. All very complicated.

AW: How was London reacting? You were presumably sending reports home, was there support from the centre?

DG: There was a mixed response. The Department at desk level were very supportive and the European Union became involved in this, they made lots of noises and resolutions. All the European Ambassadors on the spot were a tight little group and we coordinated what we were doing. All that was fine. But there were two flies in the ointment. One was that the Americans were simply not concerned. My American colleague, who was a delightful friend, said that he would like to support me but that his orders from Washington were that the President of Sri Lanka (this is the second one by now) was a strong leader and was in control and they wanted to see a firm hand there, rather than leave it to the Chinese or someone to come in so he wasn't allowed to say or do anything. So that was that. The other thing was that Douglas Hurd, our then Secretary of State, was also dead against doing anything or getting involved.

The Minister of State at one stage, when I went back to London to brief and debrief, told me, after I had told him what was going on, that it was terrible and I must go back and thump the table! I said that I would be delighted to and had been thumping the table a bit and said that it would be helpful if he could give me a nice instruction to that effect. The extraordinary thing was that he did.

AW: Who was the Minister of State?

DG: Mark Lennox Boyd. He sent a telegram with a perfect instruction to see the President and tell him that Her Majesty's Government was deeply concerned. I took the telegram along and had my interview with the President, he had his two note takers there, so it all went on the record, he smiled impassively, not a bit abashed. He said "Yes, Mr High Commissioner, I agree there are some very bad things going on, loss of life and some forces seem to be out of control but we are doing our best to control the situation and I am setting up a task force to keep an eye on it and if you wish to keep in touch with them I am sure you will find that things are going well". A task force was set up and we met with it from time to time and were given the usual run around. They said the killings were being done at night by people in black masks and they didn't know who they were and it was all very difficult. And that is far as we got.

The rebellion was crushed but then after it was crushed I said to them that surely now was the time to get reconciliation and they didn't. They pressed on. For the first time I heard the words "The Indonesian Solution" from the Minister of Defence, no less, at a cocktail party. He told me quite unashamedly that they had thought of all the options and that this was regretfully the only solution. He looked at me wondering whether I had got the point and as it happened I had. It was not long after Peter Weir had produced his film "The Year of Living Dangerously" which was all about the Indonesian uprising of 1965 in the course of which about a million young Indonesians were killed by the security forces. The point of it was, its rationale and philosophical background, was, although they probably didn't know about Herod and the Bible, they had taken the point that if you killed enough young people there would be nobody left to carry on. The Indonesians thought that by taking out a million it would just about do the trick. The Sri Lankan Minister of Defence told me that as they were only a tenth the size of Indonesia, about 100,000 would do it, and they were prepared to take out 100,000 youngsters between the ages of 16 and 25. They couldn't afford to put them on trial or look for evidence because that would take too much time. They thought the essential thing was to get on with it and that was what they were doing going around at night in the villages and pulling young men out of their beds and shooting them, burning them or floating them down the rivers and nobody has ever been able to discover how many people were killed at that time, there were certainly tens of thousands. I'm afraid I simply couldn't sit down and watch it all happening knowing what they were doing and why, so I spoke out more and more and that got me enemies in the Government.

The first thing they did was to smear me. It was quite sensible to make out that if I was doing something really bad myself then I wasn't somebody worthwhile listening to. The tactic they chose was to get one of their backbench stooges to put down a question in parliament, it was not so much a question as a statement, that I was involved in drug peddling and drug smuggling. What's more they said there were witnesses and that April and I were known to be associated with two Sri Lankans who had a record in this respect. The question was put down. I was somewhere up in the north and I came rushing back and discovered that this backbench MP had been put up to it by a Minister in the Government who was then busily briefing everybody in the foreign press and drawing attention to this question. Wonderful things came out! April was said to have been observed in the south east corner of the country handing out drugs on street corners! Naturally our son Patrick was said to have been giving drug-fuelled parties in our house and we were generally involved up to our necks. So the tactic was clear; the press would get hold of these stories, publish them and the Foreign Office couldn't possibly support one of their representatives who had this smell around him. The strange thing was that the press didn't publish it. The foreign press just steered clear of it. One of my friends, a foreign correspondent, told me that they all knew what was going on and they weren't going to play that game.

The Government then shot themselves in the foot. A few days after that they abducted and killed a well-known TV presenter, it was as if Jeremy Paxman had been picked up and dropped from a helicopter out at sea. Unfortunately for them the body was then washed up on a public beach and it soon became pretty obvious what had happened because the body couldn't have got there otherwise. It had to have been dropped by helicopter and nobody but the Government had helicopters. That brought international opinion crashing in in a way that the Government had not calculated.

So I was then off my own little hook and was able to swim with an incoming tide as it were.

AW: Did you fear for your own security during this period?

DG: Curiously enough I didn't. The Sri Lankans had a very long, well deserved reputation for looking after foreigners, I had a lot of friends in all areas by then and I just felt safe somehow. We used to wander all over the place during curfews, when Sri Lankans couldn't, and we never felt remotely unsafe. It was very touching when we went out and about and people recognised us. They, of course, felt that they were the targets.

It will all be in my book, if it ever comes out.

AW: Yes, let us make note of your book, for future researchers. What is your book entitled?

DG: “A Sri Lankan Tempest”. It hasn’t come out yet, it is still in gestation but I don’t think the title is going to change.

AW: So you were booted out and came back to London?

DG: I landed back in London with no future. I went in to see the Foreign Office and was told quite clearly that whilst I had been expected to bang the table and so on I was not expected to go so far as to be booted out. That wasn’t in the script and Douglas Hurd was not pleased. Obviously him not being pleased meant that I wasn’t going to be offered a nice job, which I wasn’t. So I went back into my garden here and sat around. I was told not to get in touch; they would get in touch with me.

Several months later they offered me some jobs which I had no difficulty in turning down, I didn’t want to go on for the sake of a job but if they offered me something interesting I would look at it. It might have gone on like that had the Soviet Union not chosen this moment to implode. Suddenly there were all these Eastern European capitals requiring embassies which had never had embassies before. The European Union agreed that we should all get together and set up these embassies, and ambassadors had to be found. All the likely ambassadors were tied up in other posts and didn’t want to move and they were not sure that the situation was going to last and it would be a pity to be posted to Kiev, say, and then a few months later if it imploded, to be out in limbo again.

So I was in the happy position to say “Yes please”. I didn’t speak Russian but that is what happened and I got posted to Kiev.

Chargé d’Affaires, Kiev, 1992

AW: Was this to actually set up the Embassy?

DG: Yes it was, the first ever British Embassy in Ukraine which had not been an independent country before. Ukraine voted itself independent in a referendum on 1st December. I was approached just after Christmas and asked if I would like to go, would I be able to go on 10 January? I said yes and went out at ten days’ notice and found two very lovely and enterprising members of the British Embassy in Moscow who had volunteered to

be the building blocks for this new Embassy and being from Moscow they knew Russian. So when I came in not speaking Russian, never have served in Moscow, they were able to look after me and did wonderfully.

This was ideal for me, a team of three and no bureaucracy. We took decisions as and when. We engaged local staff. My colleagues had already found a driver somehow and the Foreign Office allowed us to have a car. All we needed then was a secretary who could do anything so we advertised in the local newspaper for this lowly grade post and were deluged with applications, hundreds! We sat down and stuck a pin in and selected ten who we called in for interview and agreed that there was one outstanding candidate, a young lady who spoke very good English and came from the Institute of Welding which was a prestigious body in Kiev. Then we were set up because she brought all kinds of local knowledge. She found a solution for my non-Russian speaking because she reckoned, quite correctly, that the great Soviet body called Intourist, who had taken care of foreigners visiting the Soviet Union, suddenly had nothing to do because the revolution had dried up these things. My secretary knew the lady in charge and she was delighted to send her girls to interpret for the new ambassador and to go around with him. So whereas my fellow ambassadors all spoke good Russian but couldn't speak Ukrainian and didn't know their way around, I was taken to the centres of power by people who knew the ropes and briefed me on the way to my meetings with all the inside stories. They were delighted to get to know a Western diplomat because they had never been able to as they were too busy spying on us! It all became great fun.

AW: And was there a lot of KGB left behind?

DG: The Ukrainian KGB had the reputation of being the most efficient bit of the Soviet KGB, MI5 rated them very highly. I thought a new situation required unorthodox tactics and I said to my new secretary that as I was making calls on the Minister of Economics and this and that person that I would like to meet the head of the KGB. She said that she would like to too! So she arranged a meeting and came with me. It was a wonderfully surreal experience going through these great gates into the KGB building, as we approached the vast gates opening and on the other side of it there was a red carpet which led across a courtyard all the way up the steps into the building where we were met by an ADC. He walked us up the grand staircase and then the doors opened and out comes the big boss Mr Marchuk himself. He gave us an effusive welcome, in English, I had already been told that he had never been to England in his life, it was a great tribute to the great Soviet linguistic institute

which was second to none. We went in and sat with him and his one private secretary and chatted about this and that. Then he came to the point and said that he was glad we had come because he thought we must make common cause. He said that they had a big problem, the drug traffic; Ukraine was on the old silk route east to west and was the way the drugs were flowing. It was proving a business to keep track of it and he thought we had a common interest in getting to grips with it.

I said I would see what we could do. I sent a telegram recommending that we somehow take up this offer but needless to say I got short shrift and they said they couldn't possibly do that. My one failure.

After the discussions at the meeting, we were beckoned over to a corner of the room and went through to a smaller room beyond where a banquet had been laid out, the vodka flowed. He was very charming - someone, as Mrs Thatcher said, "that I could have done business with".

AW: So how long were you in Kiev for?

DG: Five months. It was a very packed five months. In Kiev there was nothing to do but work. I went to the opera two or three times, it was lovely they were still doing the old Soviet productions. April only came out at the very end because she had a medical problem, but she got about a month at the end.

I was living in a hotel. My sole task was to set up the Embassy and of course this means to find somewhere to work from. There was no market in property in the old Soviet Union and foreigners, least of all, could buy property there. So I and my fellow ambassadors were in the business of trying to create a new situation. I had no idea where to begin but one asks around and as so often fortune played into my hands. I had located one or two possible buildings which we thought might do but they were owned by the authorities, they were state property, the departments were being very sticky and the Foreign Ministry wasn't helping very much. They were very inexperienced, didn't know quite what to do and three or four different agencies were involved. We were getting nowhere.

Then I went to a cocktail party and found myself chatting to a very agreeable young man who asked what I was. I explained this strange new breed of diplomats. He pricked up his ears, said it was very interesting, that he would like to know more and asked where I was working. I said we were working on the 10th floor of our hotel. He thought that didn't sound very promising and I told him that it would be much easier if we had a proper place to work from

but that we were finding it very difficult to find somewhere. I said that we had ministries promising things but they couldn't deliver because they didn't know how. He said that he wanted to come and see me. He gave me his card and made an appointment on the spot. I took the card back to my secretary and she looked at it and said "Ooh yes, Ooh". He was the Jeremy Paxman of Ukraine! He had his own television programme which went out on a Saturday night and was watched by everybody who mattered in the hierarchy.

He set up a whole section of his programme to highlight the plight of the British Embassy, how the new British Ambassador was being totally ignored and how international relations were just going a-begging. He came with a cameraman to our hotel and filmed us, the filing, the communications and so on. He said a few words to the cameraman and then he asked me to sit with him on the sofa and whilst we talked he told me not to be surprised if the cameraman was not focussing on us. The camera panned around the space and we chatted away agreeably about chicken kiev and things like that. The programme went out that night and with a commentary from my friend saying that this was disgraceful. On Monday morning one of my contacts from the Department of State Property rang and asked me to call round because they thought they had found somewhere we could have. It was a place I had actually expressed interest in. It turned out that it didn't belong to the State Property department but to Parliament. That meant I had to go to the Speaker who was one of the three most important people in the Soviet hierarchy.

I made an appointment to go and see the Speaker. I'd seen him in action in Parliament. He was a big Ukrainian peasant type who sat on a kind of pulpit in Parliament from which he could survey his members and keep them in order. I went along with my deputy who spoke Russian and knew a lot about the system. We sat down on one side of a long table and on the other side there were all the top officials, at least twenty of them. Mr Plyuskch, the Speaker, greeted me and leaned across the table and said through a translator "Mr Ambassador, you know your Prime Minister Mrs Thatcher came here recently?" I said I knew that and he asked me if I knew what she said. He said that she said "Ukraine is like California" and asked me what I thought about that. Luckily I knew what she had been on about. She had been to Moscow and then travelled on to Kiev. Some journalists had asked her why we didn't have a Consulate at least if not an Embassy in Kiev. At that stage nobody did. Her brief was quite simply that we didn't have Embassies except in the capital of the country so it had to be in Moscow. But she said that we were interested in what went on in Ukraine and we might consider having a Consulate there, but that from our point of view it was as though we were

asked in America to put an Embassy in California. So that had stuck, Ukraine equalled California! So I had to talk myself out of that.

AW: And did you talk yourself into the building?

DG: Not immediately, there were one or two more steps to go through. Mr Plyuskch had his own ideas by then which he explained to me. He had decided that as they had never had to deal with lots of Embassies before the best thing would be to put them all together in one place. He said they had found a nice place, a holiday resort about 30 miles outside Kiev! It fell to me to act for the rest of the world and tell him that wasn't quite how we liked to work it and that we had to be in the middle of the city so we could quickly get to see people like him. So "Thank you, but no thanks"!

The meeting ended without coming to blows and after that things adjusted themselves and the building I wanted was eventually released and the Embassy is, I think, still there.

AW: What a story, so home you came?

DG: Yes, after that I came home, pride salvaged as it were and I went out on a high note from my point of view.

AW: Yes, sorting out a new Embassy for your country, that is wonderful. Thank you David.