

## **J K HICKMAN, CMG (b 1927)**

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**Interview with J K Hickman CMG 18**  
**December 1995 by D M McBain**

M: Interview with J K Hickman CMG by Malcolm McBain on Monday 18 December, 1995, and it is now 3:20 in the afternoon. John, could we start please by your giving me your date of birth and your education, army service and how you came into the home civil service and then into the CRO.

H: Yes, I was born in 1927, 3rd of July and educated in Kent mainly at a preparatory school at Tonbridge and then Tonbridge School. I left there in 1945 and went straight to Cambridge as a scholar, at Trinity Hall, spending the next 3 years, ('45 - '48) there, where I emerged with a 1st class degree in History. I was immediately called up into the Army. My call up had been deferred from 1945 when I had originally expected to go into the army, along with a number of other young men of 18. But they, of course, demanded our services as soon as we had graduated. I went in to the army, I think it was in August '48, served just over 2 years, mostly in the Royal Artillery where I was commissioned as Second Lieutenant and, entirely, to my regret, in the UK. I was in a Regiment which was allotted to running firing camps. We had 25 pounder guns, running firing camps in the Otterburn and Redesdale ranges, in Northumberland, mostly for the benefit of territorial soldiers who came up there for a series of two week camps in the summer. I left the army in 1950. Luckily for me my Regiment, just before that, had been brigaded into the 29 Commonwealth Brigade which was sent to Korea, but my time had expired by then so I didn't go.

I then joined the home civil service. I had passed the exams before I left Cambridge in fact, and my place had been held open. I applied to go into the Commonwealth Relations Office but didn't get in and instead was posted to the War Office. I had also applied (it was the same exam), for what was then the Foreign Service but failed to get in, so my place was open in the home civil service and I took it. I often regretted afterwards that I hadn't been more enterprising and looked around more widely for other forms of work. That's past history. I stayed in the War Office from 1950 until 1958 and to be frank that was almost entirely a waste of time. I wasn't required to do anything very serious in the way of work. Of course in the first year or two in one's early 20s, one isn't regarded, or wasn't then regarded, as capable of taking on any great responsibility. One was doing devilling work for more senior people. I don't suppose for the purpose of this tape that it is very

interesting to describe what I did do.

In 1958 an opportunity occurred to transfer into the Commonwealth Relations Office which was then expanding and I applied along with two others, three of us in all from the War Office, to take advantage of this. We, all three, were accepted into the CRO and started work there in 1958.

M: So this takes you straight into your first overseas posting doesn't it, First Secretary to Wellington?

H: No, I had a year in the Commonwealth Relations Office before I was posted. I went into something which was called the Economic Relations Department, or Economic Policy Department, or something of the sort. It dealt with the broad economic questions which were of interest, or relevant to, Commonwealth relations. It had a role in running Commonwealth Prime Ministers' and Finance Ministers' meetings, a large part of which were concerned with economic matters. I think I was about a year in that department. I don't know if it is of interest to talk about that?

The Economic Relations Department's role was to shadow the Treasury, the Board of Trade and other Whitehall economic departments in order to ensure that UK interests in the Commonwealth relationship were fully taken into account in the policy formation process; and to brief the Commonwealth Secretary on such matters when they came up in Cabinet, etc.

The staff in my time was a Head of Department (Counsellor), two First Secretaries and (I think) one Second Secretary. It was something of a hopeless task for this was a small team to "mark" all the high powered officials dealing with UK economic relations with third countries. On one occasion, for example, I was sent to a meeting to defend the CRO interest when the Permanent Secretary for the Treasury, (Sir Roger Makins, now Lord Sheffield), was in the chair and very senior people from the Bank of England, Board of Trade, etc. were attending. (I don't think I won our point whatever it was!)

M: I would have thought we could go straight on to you in Wellington. When you went out there can you describe your impressions of both Wellington and the High Commission as a newly joined member?

H: It was a very exciting and pleasant experience as far as I was concerned. I had always wanted to work abroad, it had taken me a very long time to get a job abroad. So I was delighted to be there. Wellington wasn't the most exciting or exotic place to go to as your first posting, probably the least exciting and exotic place, but it was extremely pleasant and distant, very distant. I think my wife felt more cut off and homesick because of that great distance. She hadn't really lived much away from home at all until she married me, but we both fell on our feet. We made a number of friends there. Many good friends whom we still keep up with today, some 35 years later. Critics used to say, rather unkindly, that when you landed at Wellington the air hostess would say "we have landed at Wellington, New Zealand, please put your clocks back 50 years," and it was very like that, it was like England in the 1930's or '40's. Nowadays we look back with a good deal of nostalgia and wish that we lived in a world more like that than the world of the 1990's. But even in those days it seemed very old fashioned. As I say the people were extremely nice, they were very kind and welcoming to us and we very soon settled down into an agreeable way of life there. We were 30 years old, more or less, we found good friends of our own age there and life couldn't have been more pleasant.

M: Did you arrive by sea or by plane?

H: Yes, you travelled down by sea, five weeks on the Shaw Savill Line, across the Pacific.

M: When you got there you say you found New Zealand had this slightly old fashioned air about it, but nevertheless what was your main job?

H: Well I was called First Secretary, Political. The High Commissions in those days were staffed on a fairly lavish basis, or what seems now a fairly lavish basis. Sir George Mallaby was High Commissioner. He was replaced not long after I arrived by Sir Francis Cumming - Bruce. They were both fairly senior high powered people. There was a Deputy High Commissioner (who we now call a Counsellor), Cyril Pickard, a Senior Trade Commissioner, Charles Cruickshank, of the same rank. I suppose there were five or six First Secretaries, of whom I was one. Apart from myself there was a great battery of people; two were I think commercial people, men from the Board of Trade, as it then was; there was a man seconded from the Security Service, who was security liaison; there was a Consul, but he wasn't called a Consul, (he was called, I think, an admin. officer) but he was of First Secretary rank and he did the Consular work, which was rather a lot

in those days. There was a specialist from the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, an Agricultural Attaché. We had all this talent and it was a fairly nice life. There wasn't really, in my view, enough work to go around. In fact I remember my immediate boss, Cyril Pickard, telling me that really this mission would only work properly if one or more of us was always away touring. There were too many of us on the ground, in the office. By that I think he really meant that he liked to be in the office and in charge, while his boss, the High Commissioner was away touring, or vice versa. But it did apply at the lower levels too and we did a lot of travelling about New Zealand.

The big issue which we were dealing with, in that post and world wide, was the attempt made, in 1961, by the British Government, under the Prime Minister's leadership, Harold Macmillan's leadership, to get into the European Common Market. That of course came as a huge shock to the New Zealand Government and to New Zealand as a whole, because they had developed their economy very largely on the basis of being a farm to supply food to the British market, to the British consumer. The Common Agricultural Policy was just not reconcilable with the total freedom of entry which New Zealand then enjoyed in the British market.

M: Do you have any idea now how much of their exports were directed towards the UK?

H: I couldn't give you a figure. An enormous preponderance. They began to develop, then and afterwards, markets for dairy products, meat, sheep meat and beef, in other parts of the world. I think originally they started to diversify into the Japanese market, I may be wrong on that, maybe they started first into the Middle East. Now I think they have quite substantial exports of meat to those markets. Then they were only just beginning.

M: What about imports from the UK?

H: Again, I can't remember the figures but the quid pro quo was of course tariff preference for British products in the New Zealand market. But New Zealand was already beginning to give tariff preferences to other countries, by whittling down benefits for British exports and opening up their market to other competition. That was one of the points which was much talked about in those days. I personally believe that the New Zealanders would inevitably, as their economy grew and diversified and they began to produce other commodities, that they would inevitably have eaten into the old system of

Commonwealth preferences because of the need to create new markets for their own exports in other parts of the world. But of course, as they could say with some justice, we proposed to make a much bigger dent in the system than they had done at that time.

M: Did you yourself have any contact with New Zealand political leaders?

H: I did, yes; it's a small place. When I was only 32 or something like that, quite junior, I had opportunities on a fairly casual and occasional basis to meet Walter Nash, who was the Prime Minister of the Labour Government of New Zealand. I forget which year he left office. I met him and his successor who was Keith Holyoake, who later became Sir Keith Holyoake, the National Party Prime Minister. The Holyoakes lived two doors away from us in Wellington and one saw Mrs Holyoake and knew her socially as it were. Not so much Keith who was a busy politician, but we occasionally went to their house for a business party or something of that sort. Walter Nash was a fascinating man. He was by origin a British labour politician of the solid middle of the road kind that Attlee represented. He had come to New Zealand as a young man, made his mark in New Zealand politics and became the Labour leader and Prime Minister. He wasn't the type of man who was really cut out, one would say, as a political leader, let alone a leader of a government. He was a marvellous human personality who loved nothing better than to talk to any kind of audience of people, whether it was the Mothers' Union, Returned Serviceman's Association, the Boy Scouts or any group of people, ordinary people. He was extremely good at it. A type of grassroots politician which probably doesn't exist nowadays.

M: When you were arguing with the New Zealanders about the possibility of Britain joining the European Common Market, with whom did you argue?

H: Well, it went on at nearly all levels. Primarily at the level of Ministers to whom the High Commissioner would be talking, all the ministers probably, but primarily the Foreign Minister, the Minister of Agriculture, the Minister of Trade. He would have constant contacts with all of them: I think that the Deputy High Commissioner, Cyril Pickard, had a good many contacts at that level too. But he would also have contacts at the senior official level, mostly in the Foreign Ministry or, as they called it, the Department of External Affairs. The senior Trade Commissioner would be playing his part with the trade officials. The Agricultural Secretary or Attaché would be very heavily engaged with the agricultural people who of course were the ones really in the firing line. But

everybody in the Mission was expected to, and we all did I think, play a part in trying to convert the New Zealander on the street to the idea that Britain joining the Common Market wouldn't be the end of the world for New Zealand.

So we used to go around, not only in Wellington and Auckland, the largest city and commercial capital, but all around the country, taking the gospel, talking at Rotary clubs, Chambers of Commerce, Universities and anybody who wanted a speaker. In those days this was a quite a normal thing to do and actually made that process of touring around the country, getting to know the remoter parts and trying to make contact with people there, actually made it rather more valuable. There was now an important issue to talk about. We had a real political problem to discuss and we all tried. I don't know if we succeeded very well. I don't think the New Zealanders were ever persuaded to any significant extent that we were right to do what we were doing or, more important, that it wasn't entirely at their expense that we would be joining the Common Market.

M: Was New Zealand at that time a member of the sterling bloc do you remember?

H: Yes.

M: So they were closely tied to us financially?

H: Yes.

M: And no doubt had sterling balances in London?

H: Yes they did.

M: So the relationship was a good deal closer than it might appear now days?

H: It was; it was very close indeed. We weren't far from the war, 15 years or so from the end of the war. In 1939 New Zealand had made our cause their cause. They regarded our cause and our fate as their cause and their fate, and were very proud and would constantly tell you, that Peter Fraser, the Prime Minister of the day in 1939, was the first Commonwealth Prime Minister to declare that "where Britain stands we stand". Those words I think. That gave a lot of power to their plea that we shouldn't betray them

(as they saw it) in this way, and one felt it. There was a very strong bond because they had sent their young men to fight in a war which had European causes.

M: Indeed, so you must have been very sad to leave when your time came and you went back to the CRO in the East African Department.

H: Yes, it was sad to leave. We had been three years there and, despite occasional stresses and strains, we never lost friends over this issue. I have been back once or twice, about three or four times in all I suppose, and still get visits from New Zealand friends over here, from time to time.

M: In 1962 - '64 you were in East Africa Department and I see that in '62 you were Assistant Secretary-General of the Uganda, Kenya and Zanzibar independence conferences?

H: Yes, I think that they were different dates. My initiation took the form of being made Assistant Secretary-General of the Ugandan Independence Conference, which was being conducted by the Colonial Office. I sat in on that and learnt about Uganda for several weeks before I actually took up the East African desk job in the CRO. The Kenya and Zanzibar conferences took place, from recollection, about a year later.

M: Yes. Kenya became independent in December 1963 and Uganda became independent in 1962.

H: I must be right about that date, '62, and I was certainly was at the Uganda conference. They must have been internally self-governing, I think, in '61. I think there were two stages.

M: Yes, yes perhaps. But certainly Kenya became independent in '63.

H: Yes, the Kenya and Zanzibar conferences were more or less consecutive, if I have it right. That of course was much more difficult than the Ugandan conference. Tanganyika had already become independent. All the East African territories were being given independence as part of the programme initiated by the "Winds of Change" speech of Harold Macmillan. The difficult issues as we saw them at the time, I think, arose in the case of Kenya, where there was a white settler population owning a good deal of land,

whose position had to be considered. In Uganda, I suppose, there may have been a few white farmers, but they were very few. In both countries there were of course difficult tribal rivalries which had to be taken into account.

There was another problem in Zanzibar. That was that there was a racial split between the Arab rulers, who had in fact dominated Zanzibar from the days of the slave trade, and the African population who were more numerous but less powerful. The trouble there was that the Sultan of Zanzibar, to whose Government we conceded independence, was not really representative of the whole population and we learnt that pretty quickly when only a few months later there was a totally unforeseen revolution overnight. I remember being woken up at 2 o'clock in the morning at home, going into the office, on whatever the date was, I couldn't tell you the date ...

M: It was, it could equally have been January 1964.

H: Yes, I remember going to the office and being there in the office without any breakfast till about 8 o'clock at night, something like that, trying to deal with this, as I said, totally unforeseen revolution.

M: Who were you in contact with at that time? Were you getting reports from the High Commission?

H: We got some early reports but then we lost contact. I think the communications were very much less efficient in those days than they are now, and that they were still using book cyphers in Zanzibar. I really don't remember for sure, but it was certainly quite primitive by modern standards of communication and we lost contact with the High Commissioner, who was Tim Crosthwaite.

M: I'm sure that it would have been book cypher in Zanzibar, but we had a diplomatic wireless service from Nairobi to the Foreign Office.

H: Yes. Well from recollection, which is very poor now, I remember an incident when we managed to restore some communication by short range radio link between the High Commission and a naval support vessel, a fleet auxiliary vessel, which was in the area and which we put down offshore Zanzibar to relay messages for us. I remember

thinking that the unfortunate wireless operator on that vessel, who was only used to doing weather reports from time to time, was getting vastly long diplomatic messages all which had to be cyphered, and wondering how he coped. There was also an incident where we had to get the short range radio on shore, probably from this vessel. Somebody landed on this tropical island where there was virtual anarchy at that time and nobody knew who was in charge, or what would be the reaction of the Zanzibaris, if they met a British sailor carrying a radio. They did it by waiting, if I remember rightly, waiting until the hottest time of the day when everybody was asleep and tip-toed quietly ashore, getting this radio in position. It was a real mess, we had very little information and we didn't know who we were dealing with, we didn't know who the revolution leaders were. There was a lot speculation and unconfirmed information about somebody who was known as Field Marshal Okello, I think. Perhaps I am confusing ...

M: I remember that name.

H: He was a Kenyan. I think he did exist, although I may be wrong in thinking he had any connections with Zanzibar. But we really didn't know where we were. I had very little experience of Zanzibar, having only come on the scene recently. The first thing I did was to get hold of the two or three people from the Colonial Office who had dealt with Zanzibar but who were now no longer responsible for it. I could only go to the Colonial Office to tell us who was who and what was what. Eventually we had a whole battery of ex - Zanzibar experts on call. But the basic problem was we had made an agreement, an independence arrangement with the Sultan of Zanzibar and he had been overthrown within a few weeks by a violent revolution. The Revolution had been successful and was not being resisted. That became clear after a while. The Sultan left, we identified that revolutionaries were in charge, but we didn't really know who they were. The Secretary of State, Duncan Sandys, was extremely reluctant to give any recognition to this revolutionary government. He regarded himself as committed completely to the Sultan because he had so recently signed an agreement with the Sultan and he wasn't prepared to do anything to contradict or take away from that agreement, so we were in an ambiguous situation for a long time.

M: Yes it was a fascinating period. It was certainly quite exciting for the people on the ground.

H: The Zanzibar Revolution was followed, of course, by a mutiny in the King's African Rifles which was in effect the Tanganyikan Army, which for some time seemed to be trying to run a similar sort of revolution in Tanganyika to get rid of the established government, led by Julius Nyerere; and substitute I don't know what. A soviet of army sergeants, I suppose, would have been the solution!

M: It was certainly very left wing in my recollection.

H: Yes, and the whole of East Africa was wobbling in the same direction. I remember an occasion in the Commonwealth Relations Office when both Nyerere and President Kenyatta of Kenya and President Obote in Uganda, had all indicated to the British High Commissioners that they would like British troops to intervene to sort out the unrest, as it was in the case of Uganda and Kenya, or mutiny as it seemed to be in Tanganyika, and shore up the established government. We had a meeting, I recall, in the CRO cypher room with the Secretary of State, Duncan Sandys, and the VCIGS, (I forget his name now.) We were standing around there with Duncan Sandys saying "I will not authorise anything until I have, from the High Commissioners, a request in writing from the Presidents to do it." But he was ready to do it and keen to do it the moment he got a written request. Eventually, the three Presidents signed these written requests and the troops could be dispatched by air to Dar-es-Salaam and Entebbe to do the job, which was completely successful. I remember there was also a Royal Naval vessel involved, I think it was a commando landing ship, if that's the right title. It was a substantial vessel which could have put troops ashore in Dar-es-Salaam but in fact played its role by lying offshore and letting off a lot of very loud noises. It did the trick. Perhaps this was one of the last examples of successful "gunboat diplomacy."

M: After your stint in the East African Department you moved over to the Foreign Office and from there into the Diplomatic Service Administration Office. Presumably this was in connection with the forthcoming amalgamation of the Foreign Office with the Commonwealth Relations Office. Could you tell us something about that particular period of your service?

H: Yes. I was one of, I think, three or four Commonwealth Relations Office people who crossed into the Foreign Office for a short time into various jobs in the Foreign Office

departments, which later became joint departments forming the Diplomatic Service Administration Office, the nucleus in the process of amalgamating the old Foreign Service, the Commonwealth Service, Colonial Office and the Trade Commission Service. One other person who moved at the same time, I think, was Mark Allen, who was one of the Commonwealth Relation Office Inspectorate, who became joint inspector. I was another and became assistant Head of the Department in the Foreign Office known as the Establishment and Organisation Department, which is nowadays called something like Personnel Policy Department. There were others but I really forget who they were now.

At any rate I worked for a time as a member of a Foreign Office department and then we started to deal with the implementation of the Duncan Committee Report, which had established the conditions of service and many other guidelines for a joint service. Part of my role was to review all the staffing arrangements of all the missions, both foreign and Commonwealth, and try to bring them into line in terms of size and structure. As you know the Foreign Office had rather a different structure in their political missions, where a key role was played by the Head of Chancery. This was unknown to the Commonwealth Office in those days. In the Commonwealth Office Missions this co-ordinating role was taken by the number two in the mission, a Deputy High Commissioner, almost exactly what an American Deputy Head of Mission is in an American Foreign Service mission. I have the impression that since you and I have retired the joint diplomatic service has rather gone over to that type of organisation. You hear talk of Deputy Head of Mission these days; whether he has the function of co-ordination which the Head of Chancery had, I don't know. Anyway, what we were in fact doing in the 1960's was introducing the Foreign Office methods and organisation into Commonwealth missions.

M: Were you increasing the CRO staff?

H: No, the pressure was to reduce CRO staff because it was believed, and I think it was true, that the CRO had been more lavishly staffed than the Foreign Office, certainly in some of the bigger missions. I remember we had to look at it and the CRO staffing was amazing. India was the outstanding example. I don't know if you were in India at the time. There were beves of locally engaged staff and legions of home based staff in missions

all over India. So we were quite unpopular. I was particularly unpopular, I think, because I was known as the CRO man who was busily using the knife on CRO missions, which was not well regarded by some of my colleagues. However, I think, on the whole, that the process of amalgamation went very well. It wasn't easy for people who had belonged to separate departments with their own ways of doing things, their own philosophy, to meld together into a single service staffing missions in both foreign and Commonwealth countries in the same sort of way. Inevitably there were rough passages, but on the whole I think it went well. My impression anyway.

M: Yes, I agree. After that you went as First Secretary to Madrid. Can you tell us anything about that particular posting and what the interests of the Embassy were at that time?

H: Yes. I was delighted to go there because it gave me an opportunity to learn another foreign language. I only had rather ordinary French at that time. I had an opportunity to learn Spanish: I saw it as opening up a lot more scope for me in the future. At one time it was suggested that I go, not to Madrid, but to Mexico as Head of Chancery, or to Madrid as Head of Chancery. But as it turned out, I went there as First Secretary Commercial. So I not only learnt Spanish but also had a quite a lot of commercial training before I went. In the Commercial Department we really regarded ourselves as the heart and soul of the Embassy at the time because the political relationship was moribund, if that's the right word. There was a Labour Government in Britain and almost no meaningful political dialogue between the British and the Spanish Governments.

M: These were the Franco years?

H: These were the Franco years. It was getting towards the end of Franco's time. But while I was in Madrid, which was from '66 to '69, Franco by deliberate act closed the frontier with Gibraltar and created a higher level of tension, something near crisis. Nobody quite believed that he was going to send troops into Gibraltar, but he certainly closed the frontier and there was a long period of stand off between the Governments. The Ambassador was Sir Alan Williams. I really don't know what he did all day. Of course he could carry out the social functions of ambassador without any problem, but when it came to business, conducting relations between the two Governments, there really weren't any. The No. two in the Embassy was Nicholas Henderson, who subsequently

had as distinguished a career as any member of our service since the war. He acted as the analyst of the Spanish press, the point of contact with Spanish Opposition figures and did as good a job as could be done in keeping in touch with opinion in Spain. But neither he nor the Ambassador, to the best my knowledge, had significant contacts of any kind with the Spanish Government at the top level. So the commercial work was perhaps the most important thing the Embassy was doing and we were quite busy.

Spain had begun to develop economically in the late '50's, financed to a large extent by the growth of tourism, which was very rapid at that time. There were quite good commercial opportunities which we tried our best to take advantage of, or to help British firms to take advantage of. It is interesting, looking back on it, that I was never really conscious of any example of British firms being discriminated against because of the bad relationship between the two Governments. It must have happened in some areas. I'm sure we would never have got to first base selling arms to the Spanish Armed Forces if we had even been willing to do so, but I can't recall instances where we wished to sell goods but were ruled out for political reasons.

The business we were looking for was mostly infrastructure development. Spain's big need then was to build or modernise her infrastructure and I remember a great deal of work being done to try and secure, as we did eventually secure, a contract to build a steel mill in northern Spain. It was built by a British consortium. Also motorway contracts, port development etc. There was also an important investment in those days by British Leyland, or British Motor Corporation as I think it was then. They built a factory in Pamplona to produce the Mini and planned to build many more. That was the kind of business we were doing.

M: Well, it was substantial business?

H: Yes.

M: Did you play an important role in securing that business?

H: In the case of the car factory I don't think the Embassy, I certainly had nothing to do with it.

H: In the case of the car factory, as I was saying, I don't think we did have any real influence. It was a deal fixed up, if I remember right, between British Motor Corporation management and a Spanish banker and entrepreneur, Emilio Botin. He was the head or part owner of the Bank of Santander. Anyway we in the Embassy had nothing to do with that. In the case of the steel mill, yes we had continual contacts with the Spanish Ministries, their ministers and anyone else who had a voice or an interest in the contract. We worked in support of the efforts of the company, the consortium of companies, which was bidding for the contract and their Spanish agents. We certainly played a significant part in that.

Of course like other commercial departments we were doing a lot of work in more bread and butter kinds of trade, writing market reports based on studies that our staff and the UK staff did. About such things as manufacture tools which we thought we could sell in larger quantities to Spain. A lot of work of that kind was done, a lot of trade missions used to come out and we used to take part in trade fairs, all the usual bread and butter work of commercial departments. I don't remember that we ever felt very much handicapped by the lack of political leverage in obtaining contracts. Perhaps we had simply grown used to working at a disadvantage because our relations with Spain had been pretty poor for a very long time. By 1968, the year I am talking about, we'd had twenty years of poor relations; no, more than that, thirty years of poor relations with Spain.

M: Never the less, you were promoted Counsellor and Consul General and went to Bilbao. Would you like to say anything about that part of your posting in Spain?

H: Yes. I went there from Madrid towards the end of '67 or the latter part of '67. Rather unwillingly as I enjoyed Madrid very much. I enjoyed the work I was doing there and I had hoped, and been given some reason to hope, that I would eventually be promoted to Counsellor and take charge of the commercial department there when the then-Counsellor, Denzil Dunit, moved on. This didn't happen and another man, Malcolm Reid, who was a Board of Trade man, came in to take charge of the commercial department in Madrid, having been working for Harold Wilson as private secretary in Number 10. Of course I felt that this was a case of Harold Wilson's favourite being put in over my head. I wouldn't like to swear that it actually worked like that and I hasten to say that Malcom Reid is a first class person and did a very good job there. But I was offered

promotion on the condition that I went to Bilbao as Consul General. I wasn't keen on it but you didn't refuse promotion in the service at that time, or perhaps at any other time.

When we got to Bilbao we found that it had its points. Its was rather like moving to Glasgow or Liverpool, a polluted and very run down industrial city with a lot of heavy industry, mostly in a state of decline or worse and not attractive as a place to live in. But the Basque people were very good people indeed. We found them extremely pro-British, much more pro-British than the Madrileños. The Basque traditions are maritime, outward looking; they have always had a lot of trade with the United Kingdom and a great deal of other contact, which showed up in the family relationships as well as trading relationships. So we found ourselves amongst friends and we very much enjoyed the friendships we made there.

The job frankly was not a heavy one. I had lots of opportunities to travel around the consular district which was quite large, including all of the Basque provinces and the Cantabrian provinces along the north coast of Spain. It was a pleasure to get to know those parts of the country and I also had the opportunity to observe the emergence of a terrorist movement, the ETA, developing almost under one's eyes.

Nationalism had always been a strong political force in all of the Basque provinces. It had been a constitutional movement before the civil war but it had gone beyond the point of strict constitutionality, when the Basque nationalists decided to set up a republic of their own in 1936. They had suffered for it, they had been savagely repressed by Franco after their military defeat and that of course served only to strengthen the desire of the Basque people for a separate identity and separate political arrangements. It also provided a breeding ground for the more extreme feelings and a more extreme movement, in the shape of the ETA.

The origins of the ETA were earlier. In my time in Bilbao, there was a decisive incident in which ETA, who up to that point had done little more than put Basque flags on the top of mountains and occasionally blow up a television or radio repeater station, assassinated a much hated colonel of the "Brigada Social," which was really an element of the secret police. This man was notorious for mistreating Basque suspects and for the first time they

killed a member of the official security forces. It was really the beginning of the ETA campaign of terror, which still goes on. That was in '68, I think. In a macabre sort of way I was interested to be able to observe this thing and at later stages of my career found it instructive to have seen something of how these terrorist movements operated and the circumstances which enabled them to operate.

There was a big divide of course between Basque nationalists who felt, sometimes passionately, that they had been treated abominably badly by their own central Government. They were prepared to use any means, short of violence, to achieve the degree of autonomy, qualified autonomy, which they felt they should have and which they at various moments in the past had enjoyed. There was a big difference between those people and those who were prepared to kill and maim and bomb in that cause. The constitutional movement, the Partido Nacional Vasco, was a very different organisation and usually completely at loggerheads with the terrorist organisation, ETA. But that was something just beginning to develop there and most of the story happened after I left Bilbao.

I knew plenty of Basques who had strongly "Basque Nationalist" instincts and who had suffered various forms of penalty during the aftermath of the Civil War. Some of these were certainly sympathisers of the PNV and may have supported it in practical ways. At that time, of course, all political parties were proscribed so no one asked if A or B was a member of the PNV. I never, to my knowledge, had contact with an active member of the ETA although friends of mine knew the identities of some of them, I believe.

M: That was a very interesting interlude before you then moved to be Deputy High Commissioner in Singapore and you were there at the same time as Sir Arthur de la Mare and Sir Sam Falle. Can you give us some description of the events at that period of your career and what the main interest of the High Commission were?

H: Yes. Well, of course, it was a complete contrast to anything I had done before. The Foreign Office always have a surprise up their sleeve and send you, in the early years anyway, to do things for which you have no preparation. I found myself there as number two to Arthur de la Mare, whom I believe you knew well too. He was a terrific prima donna, very able in his way, extremely conflictive and extremely difficult at times.

He's dead now so we shouldn't say these things. I admired him and liked him but I didn't find him easy to work for. I suffered in a way because he was in a constant state of confrontation or worse with the senior military commanders in the Far East, who were there in great numbers at that time. Even if the numbers of troops or naval or air forces had been much reduced by 1969, we still had a Far East command with a most elaborate structure and organisation under a Commander-in-Chief who was a full Admiral. Admiral Peter Hill Norton was there when I went there and later on he was replaced by Air Chief Marshal Brian Burnett. I think it was in that order. The Army commander was a Lieutenant General (or was he a full General?) Peter Hunt. The Naval commander was a Vice Admiral and the Air commander was an Air Marshal, Neil Wheeler. They were extremely high powered officers and they had large staffs supporting them. They didn't have very many ships or aircraft or troops at that time but the command structure was still there and of course it was an ideal situation for military - civilian rivalries and arguments to flourish.

M: What were the main causes of argument between the High Commission and the military? Can you remember?

H: They were often very trivial, I fear. Often even questions of status would cause difficulty. The High Commissioner was the representative of the Queen and Government in Singapore and therefore superior to every other servant of the British Crown there, in theory. He wasn't a proud man, I would say, but he was very determined that his status should be right. The military establishment, which was a good deal more lavish than it is nowadays, wasn't very keen to concede superior status. More seriously, the root of the problem, I think, was that Arthur de la Mare had been in the Embassy in Tokyo at the beginning of the war and had to leave Japan, precipitately, when Japan came into the war. He left the Far East in considerable haste, along with many other British Crown servants after the fall of Singapore and the total failure of the military machine to defend Singapore or Malaysia. He felt, and would say so to anybody at any time, that this had been due not to unavoidable causes but to the inefficiency and incompetence (and worse perhaps) of the commanders concerned and the troops concerned. Leaving aside whether he was right in that view, he held it and didn't hesitate to say it. Of course that went down like a lead balloon with the military, so they

were chalk and cheese and there were always potential difficulties around every corner.

What we were concerned with and the policy issue that we were dealing with, all the time I was in Singapore I think, was the process of withdrawing our military presence from the Far East, which was an on - off business. On when a Labour Government was in power and off, or not on so quickly, when the Conservatives came in. The Conservatives came in with Edward Heath's Government, was it in 1970?

M: 1970 it was, yes.

H: By that time we had gone some way along the path of preparing and started the initial stages of withdrawing forces, but we hadn't gone the whole hog. So the Conservatives came in and decided to put this, if not into reverse, to stop the withdrawal and have another look at it. Arthur de la Mare was really in a cleft stick because, on the one hand the military bacon was going to be saved, at least for a while, and on the other hand he, like the rest of us in that mission, felt that it was against British interests that this withdrawal should be total. It was one thing to simplify the supporting infrastructure and establish some of the apparatus that had been maintained in the Far East, after the end of the Malaysian emergency and the so called "confrontation" with Indonesia, which had been successfully won. We could reduce quite a lot the size and force of the military presence which we maintained in those days. But I felt that we shouldn't withdraw completely.

Under the Conservative Government this was what we tried to do, to leave behind a much smaller force with a much smaller infrastructure and much more modest command arrangements. This was known as the Five Power Defence Arrangement. It offered something less than a total defence guarantee to Malaysia and Singapore, but was an effort to underpin their own defence capacity, the capacity to defend themselves. We did this in co-operation with the Australian and New Zealand Governments who eventually agreed, after quite difficult negotiations to a new political structure, under which this modest military presence could be maintained.

M: Of course the Americans were up to their necks in Vietnam at the time, and it was generally felt that Thailand was going to be the next domino to fall and this would possible have repercussions throughout South East Asia. Was there a sense that the area

was under threat?

H: Yes, there was. I think that most of us, to one extent or another, believed in the domino theory and that although the terrorist movement in Malaysia had been defeated, it was by no means all plain sailing, there was still a threat to Thailand, Malaysia and afterwards to Singapore. That was the political case for maintaining some sort of underpinning of the local forces and of course it had its relevance, as you point out, to our relationship with the United States. Although we were not prepared to engage ourselves in the Vietnam War we would try to shore up the neighbouring countries to the best of our ability. Well we did it and for a while it seemed to be useful. It involved, incidentally, a great deal of very detailed negotiation, and even haggling, with the Singapore Government about who was going to take over the massive amount of real estate and other assets which over many, many decades the British Armed Forces had accumulated in Singapore and Malaysia.

M: Do you think that there was any possibility that we could have retained part of Singapore had we wished to do so, with their full agreement of course?

H: I think that Lee Kuan Yew would have been quite happy to let us retain any facilities there which we asked for, and which he could see were needed, to keep forces on the spot, because he saw that those forces could be very useful to him, even if he couldn't get an unconditional guarantee to defend him. It was better to have them there than not. I'm sure he would have accepted that, indeed he did. We retained for the use of the British and Australian and New Zealand Armed Forces in Singapore some pieces of land and various other facilities under this Five Power Defence Arrangement. Malaysia might have been a little bit different. They were certainly a lot less inclined to take the rational view that somebody like Lee Kuan Yew would take. They were more inclined, I think, to feel that this was their country and that they would not allow foreigners to act as if they owned it. As you said, being there as a leaseholder is not quite the same as having sovereign rights. I don't think Lee would have wanted to leave any foreign government in possession of parts of Singapore's territory as of right. The nature of our negotiations was that we had to persuade the Singaporeans in each case that we needed to retain a certain barracks or area of land. In principle it was going to revert to Singapore and that in fact was the agreement which was made with the Singapore and Malaysian Governments. When this decision to withdraw over a period was made, we said we would hand over all the assets, the fixed assets, and land to them and we said we would finance various substantial development programmes to make up for the withdrawal of British Forces,

who of course brought a lot of foreign exchange into their economies. It's rather strange now to think of the British tax payer subsidising Singapore in 1970-71, when Singapore might now be in a better position to subsidise the British tax payer!

M: Did you see any evidence in your time there that Singapore was going to make these gigantic economic strides forward?

H: Oh yes it already had. I don't remember when Lee Kuan Yew came into office, was it ...

M: 1960, I think.

H: '60. In that case he had been in office nine years, I thought it was something like that. He had been in office nine years and had achieved a good deal and it showed.

M: But starting from a high base?

H: It was a prosperous, quite successful colonial territory. It became much more prosperous and successful as an independent territory. Whereas in my experience of Africa, the development, economic growth etc. achieved in the colonial period, was often lost or reversed under the independent regime which followed. In Singapore there was no question of that. I think in Malaysia too. They both built very successfully on what they inherited. However, I think Lee Kuan Yew lost something in the process. The story which I remember hearing which illustrates that was that one of the things Lee wanted to do was to make Singapore a modern city. He had no time for the relics of the old colonial way of life, even the buildings; I don't think he had much sentiment for the old wooden buildings. All these were torn down and replaced with modern office blocks, modern housing and hotels and in the process they tore down the infamous Bugis Street where sailors used to go for entertainment in the evenings. All the tourists used to flock into Bugis Street too and the tourist trade suffered. So later it was decided that this was a bad idea and the tourist industry needed something like it, so they tried to recreate it. Of course you can't and I believe that the recreated Bugis Street was not at all the same thing.

M: Did you have any connection with the Commonwealth Heads of Government meetings?

H: Well we had one there in 1970. Edward Heath was Prime Minister and it was one of the series of Commonwealth Heads of Government meetings which was really dominated by Rhodesia, I think. Heath, as Prime Minister, and the British delegation in general came under a lot of pressure from many of the other Heads of Government, to deal with the Rhodesian question in a way which would not give any succour at all to the white Rhodesians. I think that was the sort of Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting that Edward Heath had to experience which did nothing for his sentimental feeling, if he ever had any, towards the Commonwealth. I think he regarded the Commonwealth as a bit of a nuisance to put it mildly because of that kind of experience. Sir Alec Douglas-Home was Secretary of State then and he was more tolerant of this sniping, found it less of an imposition, less irritating than Heath did. He managed some of these people very, very well, I think. He was there, and of course, all of the top officialdom of Whitehall. It was during that meeting that President Obote of Uganda was ousted by Idi Amin. I had seen Obote as the triumphant Prime Minister to whom the British handed over sovereignty and power to Uganda in 1962 and then I saw him ten years later, not ten years ...

M: It was '62.

H: '62, so eight years later, I saw him in Singapore after he had been given the news that he had been ousted in his absence. That was the end. Well he came back later. When I first knew of Obote, he was considered (by the Colonial Office people who had dealt with him) to be rather a sinister and ruthless politician. Some of them were unhappy that Obote's claim to become the first Prime Minister of independent Uganda could not be denied. This suspicion was well justified when Obote (who belonged to a small and insignificant northern tribe) proceeded to destroy or at least weaken, the dominant position of the Baganda and contrived to remove the Kabaka from the country. Some of Obote's actions while in power were certainly brutal, if not worse, but his record is good by comparison with Idi Amin's.

M: Anyway from Singapore you went on back to London to be Head of the South West Pacific Department in 1971. What sort of problems arose for you there, looking at it from the London end?

H: Well, there were a lot of different problems there. The South West Pacific Department was a strange geographical idea. It was created to embrace the Commonwealth territories in that

part of the world (together with Indonesia.) There was also a South East Asian Department which embraced the other foreign countries in that part of the world. Later on I think they split up another way, but I was supposed to be responsible for dealing with British relations with Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands which were independent (Fiji, Samoa, Tonga, I think were the only ones at that time), and with relations with Malaysia and Singapore, which I had been dealing with in Singapore so they were quite familiar. But also with relations with Indonesia and Brunei which I had had little to do with until then.

The most important countries that I had to deal with were, of course, Australia and New Zealand and I enjoyed going back into a job where I had some contact with New Zealand again. The big issue which cropped up in my time was actually related to Australia where the Australian Labour Party won an election, and got back into power under Gough Whitlam.

The first approach they made to us was to send a message saying that the Attorney General was coming over to London. He was one Senator Murphy, Lionel Murphy. He was coming over to London to see about what they described as "repatriating the Constitution". This was a complicated constitutional matter which amounted to a demand made by this Australian Government on the British Government that it should legislate in Westminster, to enable the Australian Government to amend the Australian Constitution by simple majority. That was not the arrangement laid down in the Australian Constitution which has a very difficult procedure under which the Constitution can be amended only if the amendment is approved by a majority of the voters in a majority of the states. In effect that gives a few of the states the power to block any amendment of the Australian constitution. The Australian Labour Party did not like that and wanted to get around it and the way they suggested was that the British Government should legislate to amend the original Australia Act, which set up the Federation of Australia, or rather Confederation of Australia.

Of course doing that was going to land us in trouble with the Australian states. So we were well and truly stuck on the horns of a dilemma and that occupied a great deal of time, and (although not, I think, very interesting to the majority of opinion in Britain) it was very important to opinion in Australia, and very important to relations between the Australian Government and the British Government. For almost the whole of one year, as I

remember it, there was intense pressure from the Australian Government, equally intense counter pressure from the Australian states on the Secretary of State, Sir Alec Douglas-Home, and the Prime Minister Ted Heath, to fall in with their wishes. To fall in the Australian Government's wishes that was. We resisted it as best we could but it was fairly tough going, and there were some meetings between Lionel Murphy and Alec Douglas-Home which I remember well. Some were late at night when the going got really pretty rough. There were other meetings I attended between Mr Whitlam and Sir Alec and Mr Heath at more reasonable hours when the going wasn't quite as rough but the issues were still intractable and were indeed never solved. Later on followed the famous case of the fall of Whitlam brought about by the action of the Australian Governor-General, which caused the Australian Labour Party to be even more determined to change the Constitution and particularly to change the constitutional arrangement with the UK. That was one thing I remember clearly from that period. I may have got some of the details a little wrong now.

M: John, you said that some of those constitutional problems that arose from connection with Australia were never solved. Could you say why they were never solved? It was surely not due of any lack of willingness on our part to do whatever could be done.

H: That's true. We were always willing to do whatever was generally agreed in Australia. If the states had been in agreement with the Australian Central Government, the Labour Government, about a change in their Constitution we would have put it through immediately at Westminster. No question about that. No, the conflict was never solved because the Australian states, a number of whom were in control of governments which were not Labour, chiefly Mr John Bjelke Peterson of Queensland who was a fairly a conservative figure, and others. These states were determined not to give ground to the Federal Government and they opposed Whitlam strongly. We were not prepared to concede what the Labour Government in Australia wanted without being generally supported by enough of the states. If all the states but one had been in support of a demand of this sort, I wonder what we would have done? We didn't get in that position. I think there were three states which set their faces against it, not only Queensland but if I remember rightly South Australia and West Australia. So that's what I meant by saying that the issue wasn't solved. I'm not sure if it's been solved since, I've frankly lost touch with the question.

M: Anyhow round about the end of your time in the South West Pacific Department there

was a change of Government in the UK and the Conservatives were replaced by a Labour Government, under Mr Harold Wilson, in the early part of 1974. Did that have any effect on your responsibilities, if so what was it?

H: I think I was only a few months in that job as head of in the South West Pacific under the Labour Government. My main memory of a case in which the Labour Government took a different line to the Conservatives was actually related to New Zealand. Labour were much more disposed to sympathise with the New Zealand point of view in relation to nuclear tests. We were under pressure, had been for some time, to provide New Zealand with information about nuclear test explosions in Muroroa Atoll, which was available to us from our monitoring facilities and not available to New Zealand. We had resisted New Zealand's requests to have this information while Sir Alec Douglas-Home and the Conservative Government were in power, but when Mr Callaghan became Secretary of State, March 1974, New Zealand kept up and renewed demands for this information and Callaghan was much more disposed to concede.

It was not a symptom really of a greater love on the part of the Labour Party in Britain for the New Zealand Government. I think you couldn't separate the regard of either party for New Zealand. It was a symptom of the fact that Labour were less well disposed towards the European countries than the Conservative Government under Ted Heath. Of course giving this information to New Zealand would have been seen in France as (at best) an unfriendly act. This was really a forerunner of the recent dispute about nuclear testing in the Pacific in which our present Government have been clobbered from all sides for being too friendly to the French. That was the only difference between the parties that I can recall now.

The other big issue on which we spent an awful lot of time in those days, or at any rate I spent an awful lot of time, was our relations with Brunei. We had a relationship with Brunei whereby we were responsible for Brunei's external affairs and defence but the Sultan was responsible exclusively, for internal affairs. That meant that we had to answer to the world, in the United Nations and elsewhere, for anything that was done in Brunei to which others might take objection. There were, in fact, things in Brunei to which others took objection, chiefly that a number of political opponents of the regime were kept in detention. We were forever trying to persuade the Sultan of Brunei and his father, (but in reality it was his father who controlled everything), that he should become fully independent. However he didn't wish to be fully independent, he much preferred to

shelter behind us in international relations. It suited him very well. We spent many, many hours in negotiation with him and with his legal representatives in Brunei and in London without making any significant progress at all over this issue. I believe that it was many years later before a subsequent government in the UK managed to force the Brunei Government and the young Sultan to take full responsibility and become an independent state.

I was involved a little bit with the Pacific Islands and went there on a fact finding trip to Papua New Guinea, to try to learn the basic facts about the place and to make contact with the people who we would need to work with if we were going to set up a British Diplomatic Mission in Papua New Guinea when it became independent. I did that for a short period, less than a week I think, and subsequently Papua New Guinea became independent and a mission was set up. I was thankful that I wasn't sent to take part in it because it is not a place which ever attracted me.

M: Well, after your spell with the South West Pacific Department you went later in 1974, to be Counsellor in Dublin and occasionally as Chargé d'Affaires. This must have been a complete contrast to everything that you had done before. Can you say something about the British representation in Dublin and how you found dealing with the Irish?

H: Yes. It was, as you say, another complete change. I had never set foot in Ireland and frankly never given an awful lot of thought to Irish history or Irish affairs. The first thing you have to do when you go there is to learn Irish history because you have it quoted at you from the moment you set foot in the country. I arrived there to be number two to Sir Arthur Galsworthy, who was Ambassador, whom I knew and got on very well with when he was a senior official in the Colonial Office, long before, and also when he was High Commissioner in New Zealand in the period when I was dealing with New Zealand. So I was delighted to go to work under him and I may say he was the best boss you could ever have. He was a widower at that time, getting near to retirement and he was very happy to leave almost everything to his number two and the rest of his staff which is a nice situation if you are his number two or somebody else on his staff. At the same time he was always interested, always in touch and, when you needed his support or his wisdom, it was there. It was a splendid arrangement. It was a strange arrangement also in Dublin at that time. The Embassy functioned in the Ambassador's house. It was like an embassy in the 19th century or

before. This was because the Chancery building in Merrion Square in Dublin had been burnt down by a Republican mob in, I suppose it must have been, in the early '70's or maybe '69. I forget what the occasion was, possibly it was the so-called Bloody Sunday in Londonderry, but a mob arrived outside this nice Georgian house and, while the Irish police stood by, they proceeded to burn it to the ground, or as near the ground as they could get.

So the Chancery had to move somewhere and the only place available was the Ambassador's residence, which was a large Edwardian mansion, on the outskirts of Dublin and there the Chancery worked. Fortunately there were a lot of small bedrooms. I had one as my office and we managed. We had a very slimmed down staff, of course, because we couldn't have many people in the building. The strong room was in the wine cellar and we lived as a very happy family in the old style. It was a strange experience going there. There were very few papers I remember, very few files, there wasn't much storage room so one worked to a large extent without files. Later we converted a house nearer to the centre of Dublin as a proper Chancery office and worked in a more normal way, but I always regretted the comfortable life in a large private house and the absence of files. At that time the Irish Government was a Fine Gael Government. Mr Liam Cosgrove was the Taoiseach and Dr Garret Fitzgerald was the Foreign Minister and I was lucky enough (if that's the word) to have a lot of contacts with him and his officials over the question of Northern Ireland which was the overriding and dominant issue in Anglo-Irish Relations. A deeply frustrating experience.

I came into this work, not very long after the collapse of the Sunningdale Agreement, which was believed at the time to have provided a possible final solution to the problem, through the mechanism of power sharing in Northern Ireland between the parties. However it collapsed, as I believed then and still believe, because the Irish Government, supporting the demands of Irish Republicans in Northern Ireland, had insisted on the creation of what was called the Council of Ireland, a body to give effect to the so-called Irish dimension in this settlement, a body which would have had some kind of supervisory role and function in relation to Northern Ireland, but would be a cross - border body of people, representatives from both North and South and both the British and Irish Governments. That was the thing which stuck in the craw of the Unionists and gave rise to the Ulster workers strike which brought down the Sunningdale Agreement. What the British Government was thinking to do in the years I was in Dublin, was to find another way of approaching the political problem posed by the existence of two conflicting and

probably irreconcilable forces in Ireland. On one side, the Unionist majority, which although divided between various groupings, political parties, is united in opposing the idea of an united Ireland and wishes to maintain Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom. On the other, the Republican minority, which to one degree or another according to which particular organisation you look at, is determined (or says it is determined) to move towards a united Ireland at some stage. These are the hard and unchanging elements in the Irish problem and we were trying (then as now) to find a way of approaching and getting to grips with this problem.

We never achieved it in my time. We had initiatives to create a Convention, a constitutional convention in the North, which failed. We had initiatives to try to induce the IRA to accept a cease-fire, which also failed. One of my contacts in the Northern Ireland Office at the time, Dennis Trevelyan, who in those days was a senior official dealing with Northern Ireland, once said to me that the task for British officials dealing with Northern Ireland is always to be ready with another toy to give them when they've broken the last one. That's how he saw his role, a little cynically perhaps, but there was something in it. What we were doing, what I was watching from Dublin was British efforts to find a mechanism which would improve the possibilities of reaching towards a solution of this problem, or at least containing the situation until something turned up.

Later on, long after I left Dublin, the Anglo-Irish Agreement was made and provided some sort new approach to the problem. Whether it will prove in the end to be a good approach is still highly debatable in my opinion. But in my time we were trying to persuade the Government in the South to support, or at least not to obstruct, the efforts we were making to find ways of making political progress in the North; and trying to persuade them to help us to maintain safety and security in the North by co-operation between the police forces, Royal Ulster Constabulary in the North and the Garda in the South. In our view this should have included the two armies but the Irish Government were never prepared to contemplate any co-operation between the British and the Irish Armed Forces and the extent to which they would allow co-operation between the police forces was pretty limited. It was a very slow up-hill task to persuade them to allow more co-operation. There are many reasons for this but it was a deeply frustrating business day in day out, to try to get them to move on these issues, issues on which in any normal circumstances you would have thought a Government in Dublin would have been prepared to be more co-operative.

M: Yes, it must have been an extremely frustrating period for you and then you were there, I think, at the time of the assassination of Christopher Ewart-Biggs, who would have recently been appointed as successor to Arthur Galsworthy. Would you like to say something about that?

H: Yes, I would. He had only been about two weeks in Dublin when he was blown up by an IRA bomb, laid in a culvert under the road over which his car had to travel every day he left the residence. I was lucky that I wasn't in the car myself, that was because we had visiting at that time Brian Cubbon, who was the Permanent Secretary of the Northern Ireland Office, and his Private Secretary, Judith Cook. With the driver, they were travelling in the official car down to a meeting in Dublin in the Department of Foreign Affairs. Because I came from a different direction and the car was full, I went in my own car direct, otherwise I might have gone the same way as Christopher Ewart-Biggs and the Private Secretary. The other two survived despite an enormous explosion.

I was deeply affected as was everybody remotely concerned with it, by this appalling event. It's not more appalling than things that happened many times in the North of Ireland and in other parts of the world before and since, but to us it was very immediate. It had a huge effect too on Irish opinion but the Irish people, who were so shocked and appalled and hurried so fast to express their regret and detestation of this crime, within a week or two had reverted to the same attitudes that they had before. I felt it very harshly at the time. We organised a memorial service for our Ambassador at the invitation of all the appropriate authorities, to be held in the Church of Ireland Cathedral in Dublin. The order of the service was composed by Mrs Ewart-Biggs, with some of us in the Embassy and the Dean of St Patrick's. I think we had some advice also from Cardinal Hume, who was in Ireland at the time. Foreign Minister, Garret Fitzgerald knew all about it and also made suggestions on the service.

The night before the service, about 3 in the morning, I got a call from a person I knew well who was the Editor of the Irish Times to tell me that he had heard that we were going to play the British National Anthem during the service as well as the Irish Anthem. He said that this would give offence or would be found objectionable by many people in Ireland to play the British Anthem, and asked me to stop it. I found it almost unbelievable that this should have been put me at any time, let alone at 3 o'clock in the morning the night before the service. We didn't play either of the Anthems in the

end because we took the view that if anybody was going to object, it didn't make that much difference whether they were played or not. So we didn't do it. The fact that objections of this petty kind could be expressed, made me despair of the attitudes of people in Ireland to the relationship with Britain. My despair was not lightened by the fact that neither the Irish President nor Prime Minister attended the service.

M: Did you have any evidence of any shifts of opinion on the part of the British ministers? Did they get their views across to you in a powerful way and if so did they have anything useful to say?

H: To get their views across to us in the Embassy?

M: Yes.

H: Yes, we had our normal communications with the British Government. Most of our instructions, although they came technically from the Foreign Office, really originated as often as not in the Northern Ireland Office who were primarily responsible for policy in Northern Ireland. There was a very close liaison between the Northern Ireland Office and the Foreign Office. Foreign Office ministers might not necessarily play much of a role in that, as a rule, but Northern Ireland Office ministers were of course well aware of what was happening, what was being said and the instructions that we were being given.

The ministers concerned in those days were Merlyn Rees and Roy Mason. Or was there another one? They were the two I chiefly remember. They quite frequently came down to Dublin for meetings with their Irish counterparts and so we saw quite a lot of them. This was one of the ways in which we sought to keep the Irish Government informed and keep them as well disposed as we could to what we were trying to do.

This was the time before the Irish Government had a right, as they now have under the Anglo-Irish Agreement, to be consulted. We did never the less consult them but the relationship was I suppose, looser. We had some contacts from time to time with Foreign Office ministers, with Mr Callaghan when he was Foreign Secretary, with David Owen later I think. There was a very brief period when Tony Crosland was Foreign Secretary but I don't remember him taking any role whatever in Ireland in the short time he was there. I remember Roy Hattersley appearing occasionally but more often than

not the Foreign Office ministers would come to Dublin for matters related with the European Community rather than the problems of Northern Ireland.

I cannot recall any special difficulties in dealing with the Irish on EC matters. Our interests quite often differed from theirs and I believe it might be (and often was) rather easier to reconcile such differences with Ireland than with other EC countries, because while we have our old antipathy, we also have a lot in common.

The outstanding thing, I think, that I carried away from all that, was the extent to which the Irish Government is unable to conduct a foreign policy, or at least a policy related to the North, which is truly autonomous, which it develops itself from its own thinking and its own view of what the interests of the Republic of Ireland are in the matter. Its policy seems much too heavily influenced by the SDLP and northern nationalist opinion, at a time like the present when you have got a government formed by Fine Gael and Labour, or (as in my time) Fine Gael alone in Government. It's a different story when the Fianna Fail party is in Government because they regard themselves as the true heirs of the Republican tradition and are the natural bed-fellows of the SDLP etc. Fine Gael has supposedly a different philosophy but it isn't noticeable even under enlightened men, like Garret Fitzgerald and John Bruton now. Even they seem to me unable to develop the policy on the North which they would pursue if they were not too heavily influenced, too committed to the SDLP, and other elements in the Irish political mine-field, including, I fear, Sinn Fein/IRA.

In the days when I was in Dublin I seldom felt that the Irish Government were directly in contact with Sinn Fein/IRA, or consciously trimming their policy to suit the demands of Sinn Fein/IRA. Except I was disillusioned on one occasion when I was told on an official basis, by a senior official in the Irish Foreign Ministry, that we (the British) would be very well advised to let Jo Cahill, a convicted IRA terrorist, out of prison because he was going to die very shortly of cancer and it would be very bad if he died in a British prison. Cahill is still alive now (29 years later) raising funds for the IRA! This didn't necessarily come direct from the IRA but it shows how closely Irish Republicans are in touch with each other.

M: After this grim experience you were sent off as Ambassador to Ecuador. So once again tremendous contrast from bullets to bananas. What sort of place did it turn out to be?

How big was your Embassy and what were the main problems when you were Ambassador there?

H: Well, it was a total contrast again. Of course one was delighted to be given an embassy even a very small one. As you know, there is nothing quite as satisfying for people in our profession as that moment. It was a small embassy. We had one First Secretary, two Second Secretaries, I think a Registry Clerk, and one PA. It was that sort of size. There were about ten or twelve locally engaged staff, but it was quite a small embassy, about as small as they come.

It is reasonably described as a 'Banana Republic' because bananas are one of their key exports. The largest sector of the economy in terms of figures, is I suppose oil. They are a small but significant oil producer, but the oil production is nowadays, to a large extent but not exclusively, in the hands of foreign oil companies. The banana business was dominated by a man who is in the news often, Juis Noboa. He controlled a very large part of the banana trade, and he was without doubt the most powerful person in Ecuador. I won't say he made and broke governments but if he wanted something done he could probably get it done.

It was a very nice job to have for a short time. It's a beautiful country, very varied and interesting. In the Sierra, the central mountainous Andean country, there is a chain of high mountain valleys with snow covered volcanoes everywhere you look. 9,000 feet below is the broad coastal plain which is tropical where all tropical crops, bananas, cocoa, coffee and anything else that you could think of will grow. Finally, to the east, the Amazon part of the country which produces very little except the oil and nowadays, I believe, some minerals. In those days it was oil and just a little bit of palm oil. Apart from that it is almost an untouched rain forest.

The Government was a military junta composed of an admiral and two generals and when I went there everybody I spoke to, both before I got there and when I got there, was united in saying that this military Government will never give up, but will just go on renewing itself. It was the successor of another military regime and the story of how one took over from the other is rather funny. I'll come back to that later. The military junta when I was there were telling the world that they were going to return the country to constitutional government. They were working on not one but two alternative

constitutions. They had two legal commissions which produced two different constitutions.

They put these constitutions up in a referendum to be voted on by the electorate. Most of them had never heard of a constitution, almost none of them ever read either of the two (some couldn't read at all), but they voted and they chose one. Some thought that it was just a diversion, a delaying tactic. However, they proceeded to hold elections and a President, a civilian President, was elected. The military went back to barracks. Nobody believed that this would happen but it did. It was a bit untidy, the election was not 100% pure but it wasn't all that bad as far as anybody could discover. They elected a man who was pretty much of a Latin American populist of the traditional kind who was called Jaime Roldos and he certainly governed no worse than the junta. Eventually he was killed in an air crash in rather suspicious circumstances before he finished his term, but Ecuador has continuously elected governments, not very good ones, but they have been elected and one has followed another peacefully from '79 till now '96.

So I conclude that democracy is perhaps beginning to take hold in Latin America in a way it certainly never has in countries like Ecuador before. It used to be said that in Ecuador they have a coup on average every 1.7 years. They haven't had a coup for a long time now.

The coup that took place which is just worth mentioning for amusement, was one before my time, involving a general called General Rodriguez Lara who had taken power at some point in, the early 1960's or 1970's. The excesses of his regime were so objectionable that his own military colleagues one day formed up to him and said "General Rodriguez we feel the time has come when you should retire to your farm or abroad and we will take over." After some thought Rodriguez decided that he would go but said to them: "I'll go but if you don't mind I'd rather make it next week because this Saturday my daughter is getting married and I want to have the reception in the Presidential Palace." He had the wedding in the Palace, (I don't know whether he had a good time) and the next day he handed over. Which is a good way to change a government if you are going to do it by coup d'état.

After two years in Ecuador I frankly felt that it didn't offer much to get one's teeth into. Bananas and the demands of the banana king were about the only interesting thing one had to do. We had an aid programme which perhaps did a certain amount of good but it wasn't very substantial. When the Conservative Government came in, in 1979, the omens

for our aid programme to Ecuador did not seem bright. Lord Carrington became Foreign Secretary which was very nice for me, because he had been out in Ecuador in his capacity as a Director of Barclays Bank about six months before the election and we had seen quite a lot of him then and enjoyed his company very much. He at least knew where Ecuador was and knew my face and I found that an advantage when he came into office.

M: Did you then take time off or ..?

H: What happened was that I had an illness. I came on leave at the end of 1980 with a slight heart problem which led to a slight stroke. This happened to me in London. The result of it, to cut a long story short, was that it was decided that I shouldn't go back to Ecuador because the altitude was not good for this heart condition. So to my regret I had to cut short my time there. I wasn't sorry to leave in the sense that I didn't think that I was going anywhere from the professional point of view, but of course one's always sorry to leave a place where one's made friends and has contacts which one wouldn't want to neglect. Anyway I had to leave, and for a year and a half I was on sabbatical leave from the Office mostly attached to the Inchcape Group and for a short time to Barings Bank and doing one or two other odd jobs. I was chair of the Belize Independence Conference in 1980, which I always took pride in because that constitution has now lasted and not been replaced to the best of my knowledge. It's lasted for fifteen years, which is more than be said for most independent constitutions.

M: After that period you were reappointed as an Ambassador, this time to Chile, which was a substantial country. Would you like to deal with the problems of being Ambassador to Chile especially in the period 1982 - '87?

H: We went to Chile in June 1982 a few days before the end of the Falklands War. I was originally supposed to go in May, I think at the beginning of May, but naturally it was not a good idea to change Ambassadors in the middle of that business, so my predecessor, John Heath, stayed on for a month and I only went out to take over from him in mid June, a few days before the end of the Falklands fighting.

It was a very good time to arrive there because the British were seen as the people who put the Argentines in their place. The Chileans had been trying to keep the Argentines in their place for nearly a hundred years. In that time the Chileans had

suffered regular defeats at Argentina's hands in terms of losing territory. Generally speaking they had had to accept the role of little brother to bigger brother next door and being pushed about a bit from time to time. That's putting it crudely and perhaps I shouldn't put it crudely. But at any rate at that moment there was a good deal of euphoria in Chile that the Argentines had been defeated. They made absolutely no bones about it. In my contacts with Chileans, both before I went to Chile and as soon as I got there, they clearly thought that at that moment in 1982 it was only a question of whether Argentina would attack the Falklands, or attack the Chilean islands in the Beagle channel, which had been in dispute for many years. So they were very happy that it was the Falklands that were attacked and we came out on top in that business, if you could call it coming out on top. They had been spared a similar experience. So the British were very popular at that moment.

It didn't actually last all that long. When we had to seek Chilean co-operation in handling the aftermath of the war, it was not given or given only very reluctantly, and in ways which were possible for them to deny. They didn't wish to be seen to be siding with a non-Latin American country for anything more than the duration as it were. So, although personal relations were excellent with the people we had to deal with, the actual, what you might call the Falklands factor in our governmental relations was a momentary affair and didn't last.

The big problem which I had to cope with and manage the best I could, was the feeling that was very widely based in Britain, that the Chilean regime under General Pinochet was a brutal, dictatorial, military regime, which had committed offences against human rights which had caused people to disappear, imprisoned people without trial, tortured them. All these charges were widely made and believed. On the one hand we had those opinions, on the other I was supposed to be conducting a working relationship with the Government of that country. As I said the Falklands factor didn't last very long. The only practical benefit deriving from it which I formed was in the good relationships we had with the Chilean Navy and Air Force. On the political level we still needed to have our case, the case over the Falklands issue, understood as in many countries in Latin America as possible. Chile was one of only two countries in Latin America which had ever done anything other than to line up with Argentina in voting at the UN. We had that interest at stake and it involved walking something like a tight rope to persuade Chile to vote on our side or at least not uncritically support the Argentineans.

M: What about commercial relations with Chile? Did we have much in the way of exports to that country and did we buy much from them?

H: Yes we did. They were quite healthy and from a rather low level we increased our percentage of the Chilean market, from about 2 to about 3%. It sounds very little; and it is very little when you consider that in the last century we were dominant in trade with Chile to an absolutely extraordinary extent. In 1880, or thereabouts, we supplied at least half (or even more) of Chile's imports. So the share we had in the 1980's was very small but it was growing. I doubt if this share grew because of our good political relations. What is needed for success in exporting is to offer the right quality of goods to match the needs. We tried for many large contracts of all kinds in Chile in my time. I don't recall that we won anything very big. Many of the contracts, the public service contracts never came to fruition. They were slow moving.

M: Why was that?

H: Well there were two things really. One, they were engaged from the middle '70's all the way through the '80's in programmes of privatisation, of reducing the role of the state and reducing public expenditure on all kind of activities. This meant that the state was not letting contracts in the way that states in other parts of the world would be doing. Two, there was a major financial crisis in '82, the year I went there, a debt crisis, which put the Chilean economy like all Latin American economies into a state of recession, very serious recession. The figure that was always quoted for the decline in GDP in Chile in '82 was 14%. We scream when our GDP drops by 1%. It was a really devastating crisis and everything was on hold. They were just staggering through. I think that we can say that the good work which was put in the commercial field in those years, in the '80's (partly in my time and partly by my successors) has paid off in the end. I think that we've got a higher share of the Chilean market now and we are doing better. The last time I saw any figures, however, we still weren't doing as well as the French, for example.

M: Arms sales?

H: Arms sales? Well we had a policy that restricted arms sales. We were prepared to sell certain types of equipment, i.e. only equipment which could not be used for internal repression, if the Chileans wished to buy. The fact was that the Chileans didn't buy very much from us or anybody else. It was always said that we were selling arms to Chile on

a massive scale. We weren't. The major sales we made were of second hand frigates and equipment for them. The Chilean navy was very much oriented towards British vessels and British equipment. We did make sales there, naval frigates at real knock down prices. But our hopes of selling aircraft, for example, were disappointed.

M: I see, so that probably counts as arms sales as far as the press is concerned?

H: Yes it was. I remember a number of those sales being objected to by people in this country on the grounds that these vessels could be used for repressing the population, because they could put political prisoners into the ships and hold them imprisoned there. Bizarre as it sounds, that was the argument.

M: I haven't got any other points to make about Chile. Should we move to general themes, I know you suggested one or two that you would like to say a few words about.

H: I can carry on talking about Chile for a long time but the general themes can actually be related to Chile as much as to other places.

M: Yes, that's true.

H: As regards to ministerial visitors and the like, in my time in Santiago I don't think we had any visits from ministers of Cabinet rank, either Secretary of State or anybody else. That was considered to be too much like a mark of approval for a regime that we disapproved of. The most I could ever manage was to persuade Geoffrey Howe to meet his Chilean equivalent on a few occasions at the UN General Assembly. What used to happen was that junior ministers would arrive from time to time. I remember half a dozen having come at different times. Usually it was not a useful exercise because when a minister arrives, conscious that his boss hasn't come (because it was not considered desirable for our Government to be seen too close to the Chilean Government), a minister is liable to feel that he also should not get too close to the Chilean Government. There is really no point in visiting the country if he is not willing to have a close relationship, a co-operative relationship with the Government he's visiting. Such visits can do more harm than good.

It's possible (and one or two do try to do this), to represent your purpose in a country like that as having been to go and remonstrate with the regime about their failures or their

misdeeds. I don't think that works. For a start I've never known it actually done, I've never known a visiting minister remonstrate with his host. He would be likely to get short shrift in most places if he did. And I don't think people would believe him if said he'd done it afterwards. So I came to the conclusion that there wasn't very much purpose as a rule in these visits. There may be special occasions on which it can be done and with some of the British Conservative Ministers who came it did serve a limited purpose. But my own feeling was that we are very unimaginative in how we approach these things.

It seems to be the view that the only way of beefing up a relationship with a foreign country is to send a Prime Minister, or a senior Cabinet Minister with a well-known name, or a member of the Royal Family. Of course there was no question of a member of the Royal Family going to Chile in those days. But there are other distinguished people in British life and I don't think we make enough use of them. Ministers aren't the only worthy representatives of a country and I was constantly trying to get distinguished academics, industrialists, bankers et al to come out there. They did sometimes come, but usually they did it because their own interests required them to and they weren't that keen on the idea of spending time on HMG's business.

M: Well thank you very much for that. Would you like to say something about the contrasting methods of the CRO and the Foreign office with regard to the elegant management of decline in the post war years?

H: I think we were told by someone, (was it Sir Robert Armstrong?) that what we were engaged in was the elegant management of decline. The CRO did do it, you know just as well as I, in a rather different way to the Foreign Office, by attempting to achieve a very broad-based relationship between Britain and other Commonwealth countries. One of the most important ways to attain influence is to encourage foreign students to come to British universities etc. We have sadly neglected this. Another way is by encouraging bodies like the Commonwealth Medical Council, the Commonwealth Veterinary, the Commonwealth Accountants, the Commonwealth Solicitors, you name it. The professions and many other groups have got organisations which promote close relations, and I think they do useful work. The Foreign Office rather neglects this kind of thing, I think. I've been involved since I retired with some bodies which were created at the end of the War, namely the Anglo Latin American Societies. There are a few of these

bodies engaged in promoting social and cultural contacts but they have to keep going with virtually no official help. The same applies to most of the bilateral chambers of commerce. It seems to me that to make the most of our dealing assets in foreign affairs, we need as many groups of unofficial enthusiasts as possible to increase our points of contact and influence in other countries.

M: Finally, John, would you like to say a few words about the role of the Ambassador? Perhaps the debasement of the role of the Ambassador?

H: Yes, one can't end up any kind of discussion about our diplomatic lives without going into that. I think that the role of the Ambassador has been debased or downgraded; I don't think those words are too strong. One way in which this has happened is as a result of the proliferation of ministerial jobs. When I first started in the public service you had a Secretary of State in the Cabinet and probably only one, or at the most two, other ministers who were not people who carried enormous weight in affairs of the department. They were there as assistants to the ministers, assistants at a political level, and if necessary, the deputies of the Secretary of State. Nowadays there are many of them and they all wish to carve out roles for themselves as aspiring Secretaries of State. Therefore they like to travel and engage in the most serious business that they can and that's very understandable. But when you get ministers who are unknown, whose positions are not understood abroad arriving in countries where you are accredited as Ambassador it can be rather unhelpful. Of course if the person concerned has something serious to contribute that's another story; but very often they have not got any serious business and have been guided every step of the way.

It is often suggested that Ambassadors have become unnecessary or at any rate less significant than they used to be because of the improvement of communications. The improvement of communications has certainly changed the role of the Ambassador, has left them with less discretion as to what they do and say, because they can be given instructions so rapidly and easily. But I think that this habit of ministers of travelling more, and talking more directly to each other, and of course the fact that so much of international relations is now focused on and carried on in international bodies such as the Common Market or European Union organisation in Brussels and in the UN, those are the things which more, than anything else, have changed the role of ambassadors during my career.

Are they useful now? Yes I'm sure they are because no amount of visiting by Cabinet ministers, junior ministers, or officials can ever substitute for the depth of understanding which a good representative should have after he's had a year or two to get to terms with the country he's accredited in. That said, I think that very often embassies are less effective now, that they have broadened out their areas of operations in so many ways. For example, commercial work does not necessarily have to be done by an official based in an embassy abroad. Studying the economy of Chile or Morocco or Italy or wherever it may be, doesn't even have to be done these days by somebody sitting in Santiago or Rabat or Rome. Business contacts on the ground can be made just as well, or better, by a well organised bilateral chamber of commerce, as by a diplomat in an embassy. What does have to be done in an Embassy or Consulate on the spot is gathering political and other information and assessing its significance carefully with real expertise. I strongly believe that the most important contribution an Ambassador can make is to understand the country he works in thoroughly, to have established his own credibility there and be believed when he speaks on behalf of his own government. The way we have conducted our foreign relations in recent years has not always seemed consistent with that. Finally, there is always a dangerous belief which has grown up since the infamous Think Tank, CPRS Review of 1977, that HMG should rely primarily on the Murdoch press or CNN (or indeed the BBC) as a basis for a policy designed to protect and promote British interests.

M: Thank you very much.