

## **BDOHP Biographical Details and Interview Index**

### **MACAN, THOMAS TOWNLEY (BORN 14 NOVEMBER 1946)**

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**BRITISH DIPLOMATIC ORAL HISTORY PROGRAMME**  
**RECOLLECTIONS OF THOMAS TOWNLEY MACAN**  
**RECORDED AND TRANSCRIBED BY CLARE MORTON**

It is the 2<sup>nd</sup> of May 2019 and this is Clare Morton in conversation with Tom Macan, recording his recollections of his diplomatic career.

CM: Tom, what made you decide to join the Diplomatic Service?

TM: I guess there were two drivers. One was that I grew up in an international environment in that my father, who was a limnologist, was the General Secretary of the International Association of Limnology (the study of fresh water) and so from quite an early age I travelled with my parents to conferences or, when father was doing research, overseas. So, by the time I reached my teens I'd travelled to quite a lot of places in Europe and, indeed, across the Atlantic to a conference in the States. Quite what I made of these conferences as a small boy I'm not quite sure, but that's beside the point. The second was an interest in the activity of politics and studying other people doing it. I suppose, this all came together when I was at Shrewsbury in the early '60s. I'd studied modern languages to A-level; I was President of the Forum Society (the Political Society); and, indeed, I recall some not entirely successful attempts to get speakers from foreign embassies to give a rather wider perspective. In those days I don't think I quite understood that the job of foreign embassies was to peddle a particular line rather than necessarily spread knowledge. And I remember a rather curious careers discussion with the head of the faculty who said, "Diplomatic Service, ah yes, yes, do you know anybody?" and I said, "No." "Oh," he said, "very difficult." Given that the Public Service then had, and still has, one of the most open and unbiased admission structures of anybody, who you know is not of the slightest difference. I think that's rather an indication of quite how out of depth careers advisers were 50-something years ago.

Anyway, I went on to the University of Sussex where I read economics with an international slant. I wasn't a very good economist but I did get very involved with student politics. I was President of the Students' Union; did a certain amount of work with a man called Jack Straw who became President of the National Union and, of course, thirty or forty years later was my boss as Foreign Secretary. At the end of my time at Sussex, well, again, I'd done quite a lot of travelling, I went through the competition. I didn't get through first time because I ended

up with rather a poor degree but the rules changed and any honours degree would do, depending on the candidate's other qualities. And, I'm sure that it was my experience in the rough and tumble of the student political world which tipped the balance. So, October 1969, I joined up, reported to Curtis Green Building and found I'd been allocated to the United Nations Political Department. This was an interesting time to be doing UN work. This, of course, is Harold Wilson's Labour Government, and there had been a deliberate effort to put emphasis on the UK's international profile in disarmament with the appointment of Lord Chalfont as Minister for Disarmament, and various other things as well but, above all, Hugh Foot, Lord Caradon, as our Ambassador to the UN in New York with the rank of Minister of State. I found myself, as I say, in the UN Political Department, one of two Third Secretaries at the bottom of the heap, and part of my job was to make arrangements for Lord Caradon, to act as his Private Secretary for when he came back to the UK. He was a great publicist for the UN; I spent a lot of time organising travels round the UK where he addressed one UN Association after another. And, we also had a slightly tense relationship with the UN Student Association because the General Secretary of that was Lord Caradon's god-daughter, as I recall, so this added a little complexity to the politics of the whole thing.

I can't say that it was a particularly intellectually stretching role but because we were working to deadlines for the General Assembly, there was an awful lot of clearing of overnight instructions. The Mission in New York would have finished in late evening their time, sent off their telegrams overnight which would be waiting for us the next morning. They would want instructions by one o'clock our time and in those days, when draft telegrams were hammered out on manual typewriters and then the draft cleared round, Anne Warburton who coordinated this exercise, used her Third Secretaries as rather expensive runners. So, by the time I'd finished I really had an encyclopaedic knowledge of where every Department in the Foreign Office lay, because I'd actually been there with my draft telegram and got clearance, or not, as the case may be. Preparing the briefing for the General Assembly was also useful experience in getting an insight into the UK end of an international operation, though I blanch, in retrospect, at the amount of paper this exercise consumed: two full porters' trolleys.

Also, we were, I think, the last bit of the Foreign Office to have its offices heated by a coal stove. Overnight, the cleaners would clean the stove and lay kindling for the next day and stock you with two hods of coal; it was the job of whichever junior member of the team

(there were three of us in the room) got in first to get this thing lighted and the room warm. That was what we did and I got quite good at it, I think. You rang a bell for the messenger – one bell for a messenger, two bells for a messenger with a secure box and three bells for a messenger with a hod of coal, but no coal after three o'clock in the afternoon. So, if you were going to work late you needed to make sure by half past two that you were stocked up for the evening. And, then, in the summer of 1970, the gas-fitters came and installed a gas radiator, and the coal stove went and I think that was the end of coal in the Foreign Office. So, I do regard myself as coming in just at the end of an era which was quite fun!

In the UN Department, the work was a bit cyclical. We were very busy for the four months from September through till Christmas, when the General Assembly was sitting and, indeed, for August as well because that was preparing for the Assembly. So, those of us who were single were strongly encouraged to take our holidays early in the year when we weren't constrained by schools. And, that was what I did. I went walking in the Hebrides and came back from that to find a note in my in-tray, from the Assistant Head of Department, saying, "You've been appointed to your next job. April next year, proceed to Bonn where you're going to be the Ambassador's Private Secretary." Now, I think this is interesting because back then, at the beginning of the '70s, certainly for those of us low down the food chain of the Foreign Office you went where you were told. I'd not been asked where I wanted to go. I knew I wasn't going to do hard language because I hadn't done very well in the hard language test and, as it happened, I did speak quite good German. So, it all made sense and I was perfectly happy, well at that age, I think - one's early twenties - one's pretty happy to get a job wherever it may be. Anyway, as I say without any process of consultation: "Macan, proceed to Bonn."

### **Bonn, 1971-74**

And, so, spring of 1971, I drove out to Germany. I did have a bit more language instruction, living with a family and really getting my hand in at reading the newspapers. And then I started off as Private Secretary, first of all to Sir Roger Jackling and latterly, for a few months, to Nico Henderson. That was actually, in retrospect, rather a strange job. At that stage the Foreign Office really couldn't make up its mind whether, for its most senior ambassadors, they needed to be supported by someone who had risen through the ranks of the Secretarial Branch, who was thus an extremely experienced Executive Secretary, or whether

they actually wanted a (hopefully bright) young political stream officer. And Bonn made the experiment briefly with me and my successor, and then went back to the previous arrangement of having a Senior Executive Secretary. I'm not sure that my political talents were in the least exploited in this job but it was quite fun. Again, a lot of arrangements of the Ambassador's programme.

CM: How did you get on with the Ambassadors?

TM: I got on extremely well with both Roger Jackling and Nico Henderson, though there are those who have fallen out with Nico over the years, and he was a picaresque character to say the least. No, Roger and Joan Jackling were good to work with and I stayed in contact with them afterwards.

And, so, I tried to keep Roger's programme moderately under control but it was an opportunity to really get to know a country. One had no ties - jump into the car on Friday night to hare off down the autobahn, and get to know the country and its buildings and its people.

CM: What were living conditions like for yourself?

TM: I was living actually, first of all, in what was known as the American Settlement. The embassies in Bonn were first established as High Commissions after the war and they all had to put up quite a lot of accommodation in a hurry because although one of the reasons for the capital going to Bonn was that it hadn't been badly damaged in the war, it didn't have a lot of spare accommodation. So, I was in an American flat with three bedrooms which I rather rattled around in and then later moved to another flat which was on the German economy. So, yes, I was extremely comfortably established, thank you very much.

I lived in this rather nice block of German apartments which had a row of garages, some of which were rented out to people who didn't live in the block. There was one gentleman, who I would quite often meet on a Saturday morning as he came to collect his car, and we used to pass the time of day. And, it was towards the end of my time that I discovered that he was actually Günter Guillaume, the East German spy in Willy Brandt's Chancellery, which brought about the end of the Brandt chancellorship. And, I feel, you know, if somebody had

tipped me off I could have made a bit of an effort to cultivate him and might have produced something useful.

After about a year, Roger Jackling moved and Nico Henderson came. Nico's life was a good deal more complicated to organise, but I was particularly lucky, the summer of 1972 - Olympics in Germany - and there were two of us on standby from the Embassy, in case the Consul General in Munich for the main Olympics and Consul General in Hamburg for the Kiel Sailing Olympics wanted support. And, they both rang up on the same morning and said, "Yes, actually, we're shorthanded." So, I left the Ambassador to go to the Olympics in Munich, and I had a wonderful fortnight in Kiel as Assistant Olympic Attaché. Then, of course, there was the tragedy of the attack on the Israelis in Munich. It had been arranged that Prime Minister Ted Heath should fly first to Munich and then to Kiel where he would dine with Chancellor Brandt. Just to make things a little more complex, Heath had arranged to have his yacht, Morning Cloud, sailed over. So, this was another thing that I was organising: docking arrangements for Morning Cloud and her safety in the army base where she was secured. In the end Heath flew in but Brandt stayed in Munich, so the dinner party with the Chancellor had to become somebody else's dinner party which again was, I suppose, quite good practice for a young diplomat. I was sitting in our office and saved when the State Secretary in the Federal Chancellery, Käte Focke, walked in and she said, "What's happening?" and I said, "Well, the Prime Minister's coming but the Chancellor isn't - are you free for dinner?" And, yes she was.

I finished that job and I had the junior Chancery job looking after German policy outside Europe and the education and culture portfolio (working with the British Council). Here I really was allowed to plough my own furrow because, early 1970s, Germany was really just beginning to develop something of an independent foreign policy outside Europe, opening new Missions. But it wasn't terribly high profile so nobody much higher in the Embassy was terribly interested. So, I was able to go and cultivate contacts. I spent some rather boring time, pursuing the question of illegal imports of cobalt from Rhodesia which were coming in to German ports. The trouble was, all the evidence was very highly classified so one couldn't share it with the Germans. They said, "Well, if you can't give us the evidence we're not going to be able to prosecute." So, this was an exercise, I suppose, in going through the motions of diplomacy. But there was some interesting stuff about what the Germans were up to in South East Asia and Africa. So, that was all quite fun.

Working with the British Council was also interesting because the Council had a crucial role in Germany after the war, and the senior people still dated from that period and had a certain amount of clout, alongside an organisation called the Deutsch-Englische Gesellschaft which was really quite influential in terms of the joint relationship. The only thing that I haven't mentioned, of course, is that the Embassy's real preoccupation for the first eighteen months of my time there was the Four Power Agreement on Berlin, which was the Western Allies' contribution to the relaxing of tension alongside the West German Government's policy of Ostpolitik. Because of our particular responsibilities as occupying powers in Berlin, the three Western Ambassadors were in negotiation with their Soviet counterpart in East Berlin. But, at the same time, they were in negotiation with the State Secretary in the West German Foreign Ministry in Bonn, and to complicate matters also the State Secretary in the Federal Chancellery. So, there were a very interesting series of balls to be kept in the air, and we had some extremely able people doing it. I was not involved with the negotiations at all, that was done by a specialist team reporting to the Ambassador. But it impacted a good deal on our daily lives because, from time to time, the Ambassador would have to scoot off to Berlin at rather short notice and have a meeting with his Soviet counterpart. And this provided much fertile material for the Embassy's Christmas Revue which I also took a modest part in. I should also mention - a lot of inward visits.

CM: You mentioned Harold Wilson.

TM: Harold Wilson also came to watch Scotland play in the World Cup in Frankfurt and I think they disappointed him by losing. Ted Heath came several times, for serious discussions with Willy Brandt and latterly with Helmut Schmidt, and on one occasion we took him to play at the church organ at Maria Laach which is a monastery up in the hills above Bonn. I do recall one visit which I set up (but a colleague of mine looked after in my absence): a lady Conservative spokesman (no names, no pack drill), was looking at education in Germany and it was arranged that she would arrive on a certain train at Bonn and my colleague was going to meet her. There he was, a fresh-faced young man on the platform with I think, probably, a label saying the Minister's name, and there was no Minister. So, he went back to the Embassy and waited for the phone to ring and he got a pathetic telephone call from Koblenz: she'd started to get off the train in Bonn - of course, German express trains stop for a minute and unless you're actually standing by the door, you may not be quick enough to get off - so

she'd just been taken on to Koblenz. So, she had to catch the slow train back. I thought this was an interesting lesson in German efficiency for British politicians.

### **Brasilia, 1974–78**

Anyway, by this stage, the Foreign Office had a slightly more structured approach to overseas postings and one was invited to indicate where one might like to go next. The tradition then for people in the policy stream was that you normally did two jobs abroad before coming back to London. I said I'd be quite interested in going to South America and there were three reasons for this: I wanted to learn Spanish and I couldn't help noticing that all the available posts seemed to be either by the sea, where I thought I'd get some sailing, or in the mountains where I thought I'd get some hill walking. Santiago would actually have ticked all three boxes. And a message came through: "New job for you, Macan – Brasilia." Brasilia, capital of Brazil, where they speak Portuguese not Spanish, situated on a great plateau dome, twelve hundred miles from the sea so there's certainly no sea sailing and it's all ... actually, I say it's a great big dome so there are no mountains at all, so, you know, be careful what you ask for.

CM: Did you have a language course for that?

TM: Yes, well I would have had a language course except that Bonn wouldn't release me, and then I had rather a short spell in London. There were two Brazilian Portuguese teachers who had fled the 1964 revolution, ten years earlier, and they were a husband and wife team. But about four or five days after I'd started, her baby arrived and this occupied both of them, so I suspect I got about six or seven two-hour periods of teaching in before I was actually packed off to Brazil. So, my Portuguese was learnt on the job and whereas my German, I like to think, is fairly accurate and grammatical, my Portuguese is rather ungrammatical and not terribly polished.

When I got out there I found that, actually, the reason I'd been posted there was that my predecessor had not measured up to the Ambassador's requirements and had been summarily removed. He wanted someone who would follow the internal political scene, read the newspapers, go and talk to members of Congress, liaise with the Foreign Ministry and other Ministries, and be available to travel in the country and, perhaps, support him when he was touring. And, this was a very interesting time. This was a whole raft of internal and external

policy-reporting and analysis, which I hadn't really had a lot of opportunity to do, so I learnt a lot there. At the time, it was very fashionable to hate Brasilia because all the Brazilians had moved up from Rio, and thought Rio the most wonderful city in the world – there's a well-known song which describes it as "Cidade maravilhosa" (marvellous city) - which is true as long as you don't have to work there. But I do recall a conversation with the Consul General who remarked on one occasion that Rio was a three shirt city: one shirt for the morning, change at lunchtime; one shirt for the afternoon; a fresh shirt for the evening. It was incredibly hard work, highly social but hot and sweaty and full of traffic. Whereas Brasilia was much more comfortable to live in and, actually, it was rather a nice place, and it was a great deal easier to do business with the Government as there were fewer people. And, I'm a great supporter of Brasilia, I think it has shifted Brazil's focus away from the coast which was a complaint for three centuries.

There was a lot of Whitehall interest in Brazil in the mid '70s and we had a stream of ministerial and official visitors. One which I particularly recall was the Secretary of State for Trade, Edmund Dell, who had worked for ICI in São Paulo some years earlier. One challenge for me was that Mrs Dell was very interested in penal reform, not a subject for which the Brazilians are well known; Brazilian prisons are about as challenging as you can get. However, the Brazilians stepped up to the plate on this and they said, "You've got a Minister's wife who wants to talk about penal reform, we'll find you somebody." And, so, a lady professor of penal reform was produced with some plans of a model gaol and I took Mrs Dell off to the Ministry of Justice and we were received by the State Secretary and his wife, and exchanged presents, and then met this lady professor of penal reform and I spent about two hours interpreting on this subject, about which I was unfamiliar. I have to say I did find interpreting the question of conjugal visits a bit of a challenge but the new gaol was going to make provision for these. One used to do a lot of interpreting in Brazil and I'm not a qualified interpreter but, of course, virtually none of our visitors from the UK spoke any Portuguese and one couldn't always find an English speaking interlocutor. So, I got quite used to whipping out my notebook and interpreting as best I could.

I did a lot of travelling there and saw a lot of the country including getting to the Amazon by coach. It was a difficult time for Brazil. Ten years earlier there'd been a military coup d'état, a populist President had been kicked out and a series of Generals had occupied the Presidency with a – I think it's unfair to call it a puppet Congress but it was certainly not a

freely elected Congress. But, by the time I was there, the President was a man called Ernesto Geisel who, as his name suggests, was of German origin. He was a fine, upstanding German Protestant; a man of impeccable morals. On one occasion, his State Secretary for Planning, a key man in the Government, had been caught misbehaving himself with a lady in the town. Geisel knew he couldn't afford to lose this man but he was outraged at the behavior and particularly the implications for the Secretary's wife, so he summoned the State Secretary and said, "You can keep your job but you are not to set foot in the official residence ever again and you can go and live with your popsy in her flat in downtown Brasilia and your wife stays as long as she wishes." Which is a little unusual, I think, in South America.

I was a great fan of Geisel. He surrounded himself with some extremely competent technocrat Ministers and Brazil was then growing at seven or eight per cent a year: you could actually palpably feel the country improving round you. So, it was a good time to be there. Previously, Press and Public Affairs work had been run out of Rio and then a colleague was appointed, who basically didn't like Rio, he was an Arabist by background, and there was a bit of a shake-up and the jobs were reshuffled. And, I took on the Press and Public Affairs portfolio in Brasilia, working with colleagues based in Rio and São Paulo and I particularly enjoyed that because that meant that one had contact, and had to go and visit these two powerful metropolitan centres every six weeks or so. So, one was dragged away from the hothouse environment of the capital. I used to go down and talk to the media houses, printing media and increasingly television. I count myself rather lucky in that I came into the Diplomatic Service as it was beginning to learn about television which I think was actually a closed book in about 1970, it was a rather frightening medium but I'll come back to that later. So, this gave me another side to the work and another area to develop.

I was lucky that my time in Brazil ended on rather a high note with a twelve day visit by the Prince of Wales, then a fresh-faced young bachelor. That was the visit where he was photographed dancing a particularly enthusiastic samba on the veranda of what had been the British Residence. The British Residence in Rio is actually worth a mention. It's the last grand Ambassador's Residence we shall ever build. Signed off by Ernest Bevin in the late '40s, designed by Edwin Lutyens and I always think that he'd looked at Buckingham Palace and said "Well, we want something like that but a bit smaller." And, as I recall, it had a line of grand reception rooms with huge doors – the doors folded back so if you needed to

entertain twelve hundred people, you could do so. We sold this during my time there because the Ambassador by then lived in a much more modest residence in Brasilia.

It's also worth mentioning the tragedy of the new Embassy in Brasilia, which I came in at the tail end of. The Foreign Office had commissioned an architect couple to design a new Embassy and they had produced a very imaginative design which represented, as they thought, the best of British architecture, fitting in the rather demanding environment of Brasilia. It was going to be too expensive and the Foreign Office havered and eventually the Property Services Agency, as it then was, terminated the contract. And this remained, well, it remains a sore point almost to this day. Just at the end of my time I think we saw PSA design for the new Embassy which was built after I left. But, when I was there the office was a nondescript collection of single-storey buildings, added to over the years as the place had grown. It was all rather nice and green but it was very undignified, given that we reckoned we were a serious player in Brazil.

Which, I guess, brings me to my first general point. I've never served again in South America - though right at the end of my career I was in the Caribbean - but I've retained an interest. It does seem to me that South America is actually one of our failures, that if we go right back to the beginning of the twentieth century, there was a lot of British investment, above all in Argentina, in Uruguay, in the cattle ranching and so on, but also a lot of utilities: it was British companies that put in electricity in Rio, and the São Paulo railway was a great British investment. I just feel we've failed to capitalise on that. I was talking a few years ago to a colleague, now sadly dead, who had also served in Brazil and was subsequently Head of South America Department. It was at a time when the then Foreign Secretary was visiting South America and noted he was the first Foreign Secretary to have done so for twelve years. There was lots of talk about a re-set and the two of us were recalling how many times had we written speeches for a re-set, a renewal of relations with South America which has never really been followed up. If you go right back to the beginning, Britain played a significant role in supporting the independence of South America. Why haven't we done better? We should have done better.

The Prince of Wales's visit, all over the country, was another great attempt to take the relationship forward but I'm not sure that it really amounted to very much.

## Maritime, Aviation and Environment Department, FCO, 1978–81

I came home and I found myself running the Environment Desk in the Foreign Office, in the curiously named “Maritime, Aviation and Environment Department” (MAED). This was a Department which had been known as “Maritime and General” or sometimes just “General” Department. Martin Morland, who ran it at the time, realised that if you give it a name like the “General Department” you’re going to get all the rubbish questions thrown at you, but if you give it a slightly more exciting name serious work may come your way. We were very lucky because Aviation encompassed Aviation Security, and in the late ’70s aviation security, hijacking, all that sort of thing were very much a priority. This leads on to embassy security and the siege of the Iranian Embassy happened during our time. So, this was an exciting Department to be in. My role there was to work closely with a series of Home Departments, principally the Department of the Environment but also Department of Energy, Ministry of Agriculture, to make sure that the Foreign Policy interest was considered in international stances on the environment. A lot of this had to do with Brussels and I would sometimes go and sit on the Environment Working Group. There was, I regret to say, a certain amount of trying to pretend that the rules were slightly different for the Brits. We had a long and totally futile argument on what was known as Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution: essentially the emissions going up the stacks of British power stations, blown by a south westerly wind and coming down on Norwegian forests. This increases the level of acidity in the soil and isn’t good for pine trees. Not an issue now since we don’t have any significant power station emissions left, but I think eventually we accepted that really we were to blame for this, but it was fighting a bit of a rearguard action.

There was also a real domestic complication in that we had Peter Shore at the Department of the Environment and Tony Benn at the Department of Energy, both opposed in principle to EU cooperation. So, there was quite a lot of finessing of those issues down at working level since there were important practical issues to be settled which had to be dealt with at the European level.

I also got quite closely involved with the Washington Convention on Endangered Species. I was lucky enough to be on the delegation to the conference of parties to the Convention in New Delhi in 1981 almost at the end of my spell. Particularly lucky, because the Department of Environment official, leading the Delegation, didn’t seem to have noticed that he was

supposed to be responsible for piloting a rather important bill through Parliament at this stage. He was rather enjoying himself in India and his masters were getting increasingly irritated at the lack of professional advice. So they said, "Cut this out. Come home." I found myself as, perhaps, the person with the least environmental experience, actually leading the Delegation because I was the senior Whitehall official. So, that was quite something to achieve, I suppose, in one's early thirties.

Nuclear waste disposal was another domestic issue with international implications and I sat on the Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee. Coming back to Cumbria, after forty years, I see that the issue remains quite as unsolved as it did at the turn of the '70s/'80s. Some things take a long time!

During my time in MAED, my team took on policy on maritime limits and maritime scientific research. The UN Law of the Sea Conference was under negotiation at the time and it was important not to jeopardise the UK negotiating position, particularly what was/was not permitted within territorial limits (three miles at the time), fishery limits (twelve miles) and on the continental shelf. It was very important to make sure that individual agreements or permissions didn't prejudice our position in the much bigger game of the UN Law of the Sea Conference. It's all long gone now, the Law of the Sea Conference has finished - albeit, the Convention hasn't entered completely into effect because of American obduracy. This took one down some strange alleyways, for example the status of Rockall and where the boundary runs down Lough Carlingford between Northern Ireland and the Republic and who had responsibility for the harbour dues at each end.

### **Press Secretary, Bonn, 1981-86**

Early in 1981, I got rather a surprise posting. Personnel rang up to say, "We'd like you to go back to Bonn, please" and I said, "A bit odd isn't it? I've only been away for seven years." Well, it emerged that the previous incumbent of the Press and Public Affairs job had given lots of notice that he wished to take early retirement to be replaced in the spring of 1981, but this had rather slipped through the system, and by the time anybody had noticed that they needed somebody new, that person had to have good German already and I was the only person who fitted the bill. So, I said, "Fine." I liked living in Bonn. I was by then married and we were expecting our first child but I said, "No problem". So, in May 1981 we drove

out to Bonn. I was there for five years and that was a very fulfilling job. I had responsibility for the Press and Public Relations side of the Embassy across the board, a lot of commercial publicity work and working with the German media.

The principal issue - then as now - was Britain in Europe. We are in 1981, fairly early on in the Thatcher period; my time there did include the famous Stuttgart Summit and the question of the British Rebate. Mrs Thatcher's phrase "I want my money back" plays very well in the British media but not quite so well in the media of the biggest contributor to the European Union, particularly when it's said on their territory. So, I had various schemes for working with colleagues to try and improve our European image. I introduced a new newsletter called 'European News out of Britain' and did quite a lot of public speaking about Britain's role in Europe. I was struck recently, reading Paul Lever's book "Berlin Rules" about the underlying centrality of the European Union in the German political world, and you have to work with that rather than against it. Unless and until you understand that, you're not going to achieve very much success and I simply don't think HMG did.

I put a lot of effort into this; I travelled the length and the breadth of the country. German media is interesting in that local newspapers and regional newspapers back then were a primary source of information for the populace as a whole. Many German citizens would simply take the "Kölner Nachrichten" or the "Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung", local newspapers but also with serious coverage of international affairs. So, the editors of these papers were worth talking to because they'd got views on international affairs in a way that, perhaps, such a conversation with the editor of the Westmorland Gazette or the Cumberland News, would not be very rewarding. So, that was quite worthwhile and I was busy ploughing that furrow. We ran an extremely successful commercial publicity organisation, placing articles about British, usually technological, developments, in the trade and professional press which is very strong in Germany and, of course, covers Switzerland and Austria. We reckoned that we placed material which, if we'd had to pay for it in advertising terms, would be perhaps a million pounds a year, quite a lot back in the 1980s.

I also did a lot of work with the armed forces. This is the stage when British Forces in Germany – Royal Air Force and British Army of the Rhine - numbered something like seventy thousand, so, add in dependents and camp followers: a couple of hundred thousand, perhaps. Very important multipliers if you could use them. Quite dangerous if they did silly

things which damaged the environment, or soldiers got drunk. Managing that involved a lot of very close work with Army and Air Force Public Information. Which really brings me to April 1982 – the Falklands Conflict. As it happened, I knew a certain amount about the Falklands because, in MAED, I had become the expert on Overseas Territory maritime limits and, indeed, I'd briefed Rex Hunt before he went out there on what he could and could not do. It's astonishing looking back on it. Of course, the Falklands was huge news in the United Kingdom; it was huge news in Germany, and they could not understand what we were up to. And for three months, one of the political First Secretaries and I did nothing but the Falklands. At one stage, I was writing a daily media summary of how the tale was playing in the German media, writing letters to editors, going to see editors, appearing on television, trying to explain the UK position. One view was summed up in a headline that I treasure, from the Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung, which referred to the Falkland Islands, saying why should anyone get involved in this "Fliegenschiss auf der Weltkarte" - fly dropping on the world map.

Some thought that we were putting the Western Alliance in jeopardy, and the argument that I deployed was that what the UK was doing in the Falklands was showing that aggression couldn't be allowed to pay off, and this was exactly what we were doing to keep Berlin safe; sadly this gained very little traction. One odd invitation was to the annual dinner of the Pharmaceutical Association in Hamburg, to explain what it was all about. They were interested because they imported a lot of raw materials from South America - was British action against a South American country going to impede their ability to import quinine, or I don't know what else? That was an unexpected challenge though I quite enjoyed it.

One other strategic issue was the stationing of intermediate nuclear forces – Pershing rockets and Ground Launched Cruise Missiles; nuclear weapons stationed in Germany which would have been used against Soviet forces in Poland or perhaps in East Germany. A very difficult issue, more for the Americans, who actually owned these things, than us, but we were quite closely involved in that; facing a very sceptical German public opinion.

Technically, this was an interesting time. At the beginning of the 1980s, I think the Foreign Office had by and large progressed to *electric* typewriters, there may have been a few *electronic* typewriters. My commercial colleague and I introduced computers to the Embassy which seems absurd, somehow, looking back on it. My team produced a hugely successful

daily summary of the German media which we also sold to other Embassies. Just two sides of foolscap. Two editors came in at four o'clock in the morning and read twelve German newspapers, and summarised the reporting by subject. They would read, make notes, type out in draft and then a typist would have to come in about half-past six, and type it out fair. The "skin" for the duplicator had to be checked for errors - and then sent downstairs to be duplicated. We managed to buy two Wang computers so that the material was input directly, swapped between editors, corrected, and sent electronically to the printer in the basement. My commercial colleague was doing rather the same thing for his trade promotion records. So, I'm actually rather proud of that. The other thing was, I talked about television. We were actually quite frightened about television back then. Nico Henderson, who'd by then moved on, was Ambassador in Washington, he was a tremendous performer on US TV but, of course, there he was speaking in his own language. There were many of us in the Embassy who actually had quite good enough German to be able to appear, but I can only recall appearing live on TV once, though I did recorded interviews. But, it was also getting colleagues to understand that the broadcast media are an important source of information and, so, I made two innovations. One was moving the ticker tapes, for the German Press Agency and Reuters, out into a public area where people could read them as they entered or left the building; people did indeed get into the habit of checking the one o'clock bulletin. I also installed a television which had teletext - a written news service on a TV screen, but continually updating. So, again, you'd got the latest news there on telly, you weren't waiting until it appeared in the papers the next morning.

So, I like to think that I managed to do a bit in terms of bringing the Foreign Office into the Information Technology era.

It's also, perhaps, worth a comment about the quality of people; it was an extremely strong team that we had in Bonn. We were sixteen First Secretaries and amongst those, during my time - Peter Torry went on to be Ambassador in Bonn; Michael Arthur went on to be High Commissioner in Delhi and Ambassador in Bonn; Alyson Bailes, Ambassador in Helsinki and then Director of SIPRI, the Swedish International Affairs Institute; Mariot Leslie, Ambassador to NATO. I mean it was a jolly high-powered lot, but it was also a closely knit team. We had a very good tradition that when one of our number left, we would entertain him or her to lunch at the French Club. The First Secretaries would simply give notice that on a particular day there was going to be a farewell lunch for so and so, and we would be

leaving at half past twelve and we might be back by sometime in the afternoon, but could not be relied on to do any work. So, the Counsellors, the level above us, would have to do their own drafting that afternoon and this was taken in very good part, and it was a nice aspect of the camaraderie in Bonn.

CM: Who was the Ambassador then?

TM: When I went there, it was Jock Taylor who had a lot of experience in the German world, and his father had been Consul-General in Vienna. He was a good German speaker but unfortunately he'd come from three years in the Netherlands, which had had a negative impact on his command of the German grammar. He was replaced by Julian Bullard, arguably one of the cleverest men of his generation - a family of diplomats: his father had been Minister in Tehran and his brother was a High Commissioner of Trinidad and Tobago. Julian was an absolutely brilliant man to work for. I sent him on some pretty odd speaking engagements round the country but he took it in very good part.

I expected to leave after about four and a bit years and, indeed, a successor came out to find out what the job was all about; having found out what it was all about, he went back to London, resigned, and went off to work for a Japanese merchant bank. So, I was just sending for the packers to get estimates and they said, "Don't bother." We were very happy to remain. Our two children were both born there. We had a wonderful house close to a park where energy could be expended so I did almost five years, until eventually a replacement was appointed and we had to move on. But, a very happy time and I really do think I got to know my way round the German media and had a bit of influence on it.

### **Head, Commonwealth Co-ordination Department, FCO, 1986–88**

Then, I came back to London and, of course, I think still, in London, it's a bit pot luck what job you draw; I was expecting to go back as the Assistant Head of a Department. I was a bit surprised to get a message to say "You're going to be Head of Commonwealth Coordination Department, but with the rank of Senior First Secretary (DS5S)." Up till that time, it had been axiomatic in the Foreign Office that the Head of a Department was a Counsellor; how senior, how able a counsellor he or she was would certainly be reflected in the nature of the Department, but, nonetheless, this was a hard and fast rule. So, I was appointed as a First

Secretary and, of course, my career up till now has zero Commonwealth experience, it's all been in Europe or South America. However, you learn fast. I was running the smallest Department in the Foreign Office, with four Desk Officers, a clerk and a secretary. I hope it's not unfair to say that Personnel were not in the habit of posting the sharpest and ablest officers to Commonwealth Coordination Department. So, there I was, responsible for UK Policy towards the institutions of the Commonwealth: Commonwealth Secretariat, Commonwealth Foundation (not the Fund for Technical Cooperation, that was DFID), and then a whole raft of non-Governmental: Commonwealth Nurses Association; Commonwealth Medical Association; Association of Commonwealth Universities and so on and so forth.

The Commonwealth is a strange organisation because, politically, it functions on a biennial cycle with a Head of Government Meeting every two years, and a Commonwealth Senior Officials' Meeting – CSM (always pronounced as “schism”, which seems to me to be rather an unhappy acronym, but there you are) in the off years. The big issue at the time - this is Mrs Thatcher at her peak - was the Apartheid regime in South Africa and the extent to which the Commonwealth reckoned it could persuade the UK to take a harder line on South Africa. Just as I arrived, there had been published the report of the Eminent Persons Group, the EPG, which was drawn from across the Commonwealth, who had carried out a two month tour of South Africa. Mrs Thatcher was quite clear that the lady was not for turning. The challenge was to keep the show on the road because there were lots of other UK interests in the Commonwealth: the Queen, as Head of the Commonwealth, taking advice from her British Ministers but also gets advice from the Commonwealth Secretary and Secretary General, and, indeed, directly from other Commonwealth Governments. Then there was the Unofficial Commonwealth: the Association of Commonwealth Universities was a very important network at that stage. The Commonwealth Nurses Association was setting standards across the Commonwealth, so it was relatively easy for a nurse to move from one Commonwealth country to another, and this activity was replicated in quite a lot of sectors.

Commonwealth policy was not one on which one was going to make much progress until the South Africa issue had been resolved, as it was, at the beginning of the next decade with Mandela's release and the election of an ANC Government. It was an issue that one had to manage, without upsetting too many people, and without making Downing Street too angry.

So, brief periods of rather intense political activity and then long periods when not too much was going on. The Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Vancouver was not a huge success. It got off to a bad start with some highly selective briefing by the Prime Minister's Press Secretary and the Foreign Office Press Secretary about Canadian trade with South Africa, which may have been true and certainly played well in the UK media but wasn't actually the way to win friends. It was quite a difficult meeting, but one could see its value outside the formal conference sessions, Mrs Thatcher was able to have long, one to one meetings with people like Rajiv Gandhi, which I think really were rather important for understanding mutual points of view.

I went out to a CSM in Bangladesh, which was quite interesting and exploring a part of the world I hadn't known, and talked to Commonwealth colleagues in South East Asia. My last trip was to a fascinating conference in Malta with the non-governmental organisations of the European region of the Commonwealth (UK, Cyprus and Malta).

We also had an ongoing battle with those who wanted to grow the Commonwealth Secretariat. Secretary General Sonny Ramphal had great ideas for expanding, but the UK was paying the largest share of the bill, and we had a policy of zero real growth for international organisations. So, no meeting of minds there and indeed the Secretariat was bloated and over-staffed. In subsequent years, the Commonwealth Secretariat has had to cut back very substantially. So, the regime that I put them through was, actually, less savage than what they have had to go through since.

I do take some pride in having the briefing for Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting under control. I was faced with stories of the previous Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Barbados: all the delegates on leaving had just left their classified briefs for 'somebody' to destroy. It had taken the registry team three days to put it all through the shredder, and they burnt out two shredders in the process. So, I made sure that the briefing for the next meeting fitted into one ring-binder per official and all the background stuff was held in a central registry; if anybody really wanted the detailed country briefs, or whatever, they could find them, and nobody seemed to notice, so I saved a lot of time and paper.

## Head, Training Department, FCO, 1988–90

Early in 1988, I was moved to spend two years as Head of Training Department. Until the early 1980s Training Department had been an unloved waif in extremely grotty offices where Portcullis House now stands. A decrepit Victorian building, absolutely filthy, and if you opened the windows you looked down on Westminster tube station, and so you had all the noise from the tube trains rattling through. If you're teaching languages, when people are trying to learn to use their ears, you don't want that racket. One teaching aid was a memorable video recorded by Douglas Hurd, when he was Minister of State, and was concerned about improving drafting standards. The soundtrack of this was interspersed at about sixty second intervals with the District Line clattering by.

Eventually, Palace Chambers, as it was called, was declared unsafe and so Training Department became a wandering minstrel for several months, pitching its tent wherever office space could be found. By the time I got there, we were very well established in Cromwell House, just off Smith Square, with a section of the building to ourselves. I had a big team of thirty-six people, including twelve language instructors, and excellent facilities including a proper recording studio for television training. I think we were actually able to make a difference and people enjoyed coming there because it was clean and wholesome: not everybody looks forward to going on a training course; they can be quite stressful.

It was a new area for me. I'd not really done any serious training, although, obviously, I'd done a lot of public speaking. But I inherited a good and experienced team from Juliet Campbell and had a very good two years there. Subsequently, training has been cut back and back, and the language centre was abolished only to be recreated as the Diplomatic Academy in more recent years. But it's quite difficult to see just what the Diplomatic Academy is doing today which we weren't doing thirty years ago, in what was then called Training Department. We were very focused on three sorts of training: Languages; Professional Training – imparting job-related skills; and Development Training – people acquiring management and general personal skills to proceed to higher jobs. I had a good team of instructors who were all drawn from the line, so, my Consular Instructor had been a Consular Officer and knew what it was like to face an angry client across the counter. My Commercial Trainer had been a Commercial Officer.

I enjoyed that a lot and was very closely involved. Either I or my Deputy would always start and finish a course: “What do you want to learn from this?” At the end: “What have you learnt?”

Language training - I thought it was very important that we had a professional language teacher running it and a cadre of French, German and Spanish speakers who were actually on the staff. That’s gone now and I think that’s wrong. You don’t want to contract-out those people, you want to build up a sense that languages matter. Development training has moved on a long way since, but I think we were doing some quite good stuff in terms of management training and drafting skills and all that sort of thing. Periodically, we would be involved also in providing training modules for people going out to join Embassies from other Departments, principally the service Attaché cadre twice a year, and we would lay on a couple of days’ training for them, to try and explain what this strange organisation they were joining was all about.

Looking back on it, I remember after my first year, saying I think I need to produce a report on what we’ve been doing, which was taken on board by senior management, and we spent an evening discussing it over a glass of wine with the Chief Clerk. Everybody’s doing that all the time now but, somehow, in the late 1980s, this didn’t seem to be a requirement, to render an account as to just what you had done with the couple of million quid that the Foreign Office had put at one’s disposal. And this is, perhaps, something about the way that the Foreign Office is managed. So, I felt I’d left that in really rather good hands.

### **Counsellor, Lisbon, 1990–94**

My next posting, I struck lucky because a new broom had been appointed as Ambassador at Lisbon and he found some aspects of the existing establishment not to his satisfaction, and wanted it replaced, and the job of Counsellor fell vacant. I was a Portuguese speaker. I was also part of the personnel machine, so I’m afraid I put my hand up and I said, “I’d like that job, please.” And, so, in the summer of 1990 we moved to Lisbon and I sometimes used to think, as I drove to work, that “here am I being paid to live in this wonderful city and most of my fellow countrymen are paying good money to come here on holiday.”

We found Portugal a wonderful place to live. We had rather a nice house and the Portuguese are very good people to work with. But, I spent more of my time than, perhaps, I would have wished on management issues in the widest sense. It did seem to us in the senior management in the Embassy, that there was a slight tendency to post us slightly weaker members of the Service because Portugal was perceived as an easy place to live, and for people who had family issues and so on, it was only a two and a half hour flight to get home. So, it was quite a challenging post to manage. Once you get to know the Portuguese, they're your friends for life but they're a slightly reserved nation. So, it takes time, you've got to put in the effort, you've got to learn the language and not everybody seemed to be prepared to do that.

Much of the Embassy's work was pretty straightforward and comprehensible. Consular Protection, a lot of consular work in Portugal: quite a number of residents who need births, deaths and marriages certifying, and what have you, and a very big visitor population. At one stage, the Honorary Consul in Portimão was issuing more emergency passports than anywhere else in the world; people who'd got drunk and lost their passports, essentially. So, big on that side. Big trade promotion. Portugal certainly was then a small but, in terms of the size of its economy, important export market for the UK. It was Rover's prime overseas market in terms of local population. Lots of historic links: the oldest Alliance, the Treaty of Windsor 1386; the port wine business and so on and so forth.

The political side was more problematic. We shared with Portugal a transatlantic view of the world - both littoral nations and with serious navies: so there was an assumption that this would play across in terms of Portugal sharing an outward-looking view with us within the European Union. Somehow, it never seemed to work: European solidarity trumped any trans-Atlantic perspective.

We shared some specific interests in Hong Kong/Macao and Indonesia/ East Timor, East Timor still then in law a Portuguese colony, albeit occupied by Indonesia with whom we had important interests. So, that was a trilateral relationship which needed to be managed until eventually East Timor became independent. UK negotiations with China over Hong Kong ran in parallel with Portugal's negotiations over Macau, and we were pretty successful in keeping in step. But Hong Kong's return to China meant that that nexus of issues disappeared. So, perhaps it wasn't too surprising that a couple of generations after me, my

job was abolished and there was not perceived to be a need for a Counsellor grade Officer as Number Two.

The other thing was that the Portuguese Government was pretty hierarchy-conscious, so quite a lot of people were only accessible to the Ambassador or the Chargé d'Affaires; other members of the Embassy couldn't get that much access, although, once you got out into the Provinces you could talk to anybody.

CM: Who was the Ambassador there?

TM: I started with Hugh Arbuthnott and then he was replaced by Stephen Wall who'd just come out of the 'hot house' at Number 10, and he remained still very much involved with European issues although he was sitting in Lisbon.

I did spend quite a lot of time on real estate issues with two crumbling former palaces. We had rented and then owned the Ambassador's Residence for over a hundred and fifty years, and you could tell. The Chancery had moved into temporary premises at the beginning of the war when there was a vast increase in the British presence in Lisbon; the move-in had been done in a hurry into an unsatisfactory building. We'd spent the following fifty years patching it up. So, I was not surprised to come in one morning and find that a large piece of Baroque cornice had come crashing down from the Registry ceiling. I was rather keen to grip this issue: the options were to refurbish the Chancery (an approximate price tag of twelve million pounds) or move. I struck an agreement with the Foreign Office that we would sell the Chancery and buy new premises, which we did; we sold for three million and bought for five, so that's a net expenditure of two million as against twelve and rising for the restoration. The move took place after my time but I think the new building proved satisfactory. The quid pro quo was that the Residence would be restored, using the money that we had "saved", and some of it would be repurposed to provide staff accommodation. I'm afraid successor generations failed to hold the Foreign Office to that bargain and so we lost the Residence as well. That is a pity because that was a superb building right in the middle of Lisbon, one of those buildings where, if you insist on punching above your weight, this is actually a cheap way to do it.

## Ambassador to Lithuania, 1995–98

By this stage, the Foreign Office was getting quite well organised in terms of bidding for jobs, publishing a list twelve months in advance of the jobs coming up and inviting people to bid for them in written form as to why you're qualified for this job. There were coming up, at the turn of 1994-95, the posts of Ambassador at Tallinn and Vilnius and, so, I thought I'd like to have a crack at one of these. I am embarrassed to find that I'd said in a letter to my Personnel Manager that I thought I had the ability to learn one more language, this at age 47/48, and I have to say my appointment to Lithuania proved me wrong: I did not have the ability to learn another language! Anyway, to cut a long story short, we left Lisbon in the summer of 1994 and started in Vilnius, Lithuania on New Year's Day 1995. This, of course, is the first time that I've actually got the job that I was strategically planning for in the first place. And, it was undoubtedly the most interesting job that I had done.

I was the second British Ambassador; my predecessor, Michael Peart, had literally flown in at a week's notice and he and his wife had established themselves in a hotel room. They had brought a Union Jack with them, went out and bought a broomstick and put the flag outside their bedroom door. By the time we got there in 1995, there was an up and running Embassy. Michael had secured a very early twentieth century town palace: the ground floor was offices; the first floor was residence; there was a cottage in the garden where my Deputy Head of Mission lived; and then a row of ancillary buildings with a visitors' flat and garages, and so on, and it was a really good set-up. The Foreign Office had not stinted on restoring it and furnishing it to a high standard. Given that we were very lightly staffed to begin with, just two full-time UK based Officers, we were punching way above our weight. But it worked extremely well, not always terribly convenient living over the shop, but, nonetheless, very easy and plenty of space for entertaining.

It was an extremely good time to be there. The Lithuanians were still struggling with the Soviet legacy. They had already established a system of Government - recognisable Ministries, a currency, customs, police force and so on - but they needed a lot of training. As Eastern Europe had fallen apart, HMG had set up the Know-How Fund (KHF), providing relatively small sums of money to transfer know-how (people skills) to these new or newly-free countries. For example, in Lithuania, I inherited, along with my fellow Ambassadors in

the other Baltic States, a police training programme provided by the Strathclyde Police. Every senior policeman in the Baltic States, by about 1998, would have spent at least three weeks with the Strathclyde Police, including Friday night on Sauchiehall Street - the full range; Strathclyde also delivered individual courses and so on. We did something rather similar in the banking sector where Barclays had a contract to deliver training at what was then the Lithuanian Banking Centre and now is, I think, the Association of Lithuanian Bankers. So, one can look back and say that the Police Force, the Banking Sector, the Fishing Industry – that’s another story – the Public Service Language Centre, originally designed to teach public servants English but has now developed into teaching other languages as well and has become NATO’s preferred client for translating peace-keeping material into the languages of the Balkans or whatever. Those are all things which one can look back on and say that the British Government, in the first two thirds of the 1990s, set up and drove forward.

I was also extremely lucky about the ease of access. If I wanted to see anybody from the President downwards, it was sufficient for my secretary to ring his secretary and fix an appointment. But, very often, you didn’t need to because it was a small community and one would actually meet these people at social events or wherever. On one occasion, I recall a conversation with the Minister of Economics as we were checking-out in the supermarket queue. A good team of European Union and NATO Ambassadors worked effectively together. Sometimes they were a bit reluctant to come forward. I do recall we were having a session with the President’s Foreign Affairs Advisor and he said, “The President’s not very happy about the performance of the Defence Minister and is thinking of giving him the sack.” Everybody sort of looked at their boots and I thought, “You wimps.” So, I said, “Well, Minister, it’s absolutely the President’s choice but I have to tell you that your Defence Minister stands extremely high in the estimation of the people at NATO and, if Lithuania is serious about membership of NATO, this is the last man you want to sack at the moment.” At which point everybody joined in and said, “I absolutely agree with my British colleague.” And, so, the President’s emissary went off and the Minister stayed in his job. That was an example of the sort of influence that one could exercise, and they listened to you.

EU and NATO membership were a high priority for Lithuania. The official EU/NATO line was “Yes, we look forward to welcoming you to membership of these organisations” although we were very careful never to set a date. And, I have to say, at the back of my

mind, I think we were thinking about sort of 2015-2020 not in 2004 as it all happened – but these things develop a momentum of their own.

There was a lot of UK interest in the Baltic States. We had some good visits during my time. I suppose the highlight was the Duke of York who had a day and a half in each country. But other visitors during my time included the Vice-Chief of the Defence Staff, two Junior Defence Ministers and a stream of other Ministers and Senior Officials, real evidence of interest in what was going on. It was also my first experience of working as part of a network of British Ambassadors. The three Baltic Ambassadors kept in very close touch with each other and we would have our own conference every six months or so, at zero cost because we all had large enough houses to have everybody to stay; and we would invite one or two people from London. This has become much more widely practised and the Nordic-Baltic Group are really seen as one, stretching from Denmark, Norway, Sweden and down the Baltic States and, indeed, partially into Poland.

I did three and a half years in Vilnius and I realised that lacking from my professional credentials was a serious commercial job. I'd supervised - I'd done commercial publicity work in Germany and commercial work in Lisbon but I didn't have much of a front line credential, so I said to the Office, "Can I please have a secondment to industry?" And, eventually, they fixed me up one with BOC (British Oxygen as was) in Guildford, and I was supposed to do that for a year. I had a particular purpose in this in that I had set my eye on a particular trade promotion job in Germany for which, at the end of this, I would have the serious credential. Actually, it didn't happen like that because a series of moves quite elsewhere in the system meant that that job fell free a year earlier than it should have done, and I put my hand up for it but I didn't have this commercial credential. But I went off and I spent some time with BOC Gases which I found very interesting. At the purely practical level, this was an organisation that was seriously using IT in a way that is second nature to all of us now, with all communications via one's desktop computer. Most of the work was done by email and if you wanted to find something out, you used the computer on your desk. Whereas - just going back to Vilnius - we only acquired an email address during my time there. About a week later there was a message from the Foreign Office to say that, "We understand that Embassies are getting email addresses, and this is a good idea, but just think about how you do it." Actually, it's an extraordinary thought that it's only in the second half

of the nineties that you could get in touch with British Embassies by email. Whereas, BOC, one was suddenly pitched into this organisation where everything was done over the Web.

The trouble was that nobody had actually worked out what they wanted me to do so I was posted to European Gases and I spent a lot of time finding out how the industrial gas business works. I visited a lot of installations which was all very good education and I went out and talked to their people in Poland and organised a presentation to the British Embassy in Warsaw. I learnt a lot but I don't think they got much out of me – except that I did draw up a job specification for a putative successor, attached to their central management group where I thought there actually was a role for a Foreign Policy professional to help in the development of an international company. So, I left what I thought was a good job description, told the Personnel Department people but I don't think anybody has ever been to do the job.

Having failed to get the job in Germany, I bid for and got the post of Deputy High Commissioner to India serving under Rob Young, who I'd known well, since Brazil days. And, then it emerged that my predecessor wanted out early and so I had to leave BOC early. I left that job feeling that there were a few ends untied and, certainly, they hadn't got as much out of me as they ought to have done. So, then, off to India.

### **Minister and Deputy High Commissioner, New Delhi, 1999–2002**

Again, a totally new country - I'd visited twice on business and knew some of the people. And, of course, a complete contrast. A huge Mission: seventy home-based staff in Delhi but the job of DHC, in Delhi is Chief of Staff for the countrywide operation: Deputy High Commissions in Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai; a one-man post in Bangalore; and locally staffed trade promotion posts in, perhaps, half a dozen other cities. So, it's a very big network. Also, really, very big political issues. I went there in 1999. A year earlier, India and Pakistan had both exploded nuclear devices which had caused us to withdraw our High Commissioner for a bit and there had also been a not entirely happy State Visit by the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh, which had not gone as well as it should have done. So, we'd some ground to make up.

Rob and I, again, were blessed with a very able team and I think we did make up a lot of the ground. There had been an unfortunate incident in connection with the Royal Visit when

Robin Cook, as Foreign Secretary, had made some remarks in Lahore, which he subsequently regretted, which had irritated the Indians no end. He subsequently remarked to Rob that he wasn't sure that he'd ever be able to visit India: actually, we got the relationship back on to a good enough level that Jaswant Singh, the Indian Foreign Minister, did invite him and took him out for a weekend to his farm in the countryside. So, we managed to pull things together.

The relationship with India is many sided. On the commercial side, the tradition of people who have studied in the UK, who have business links with the UK going back years, is helpful. And, dealing with the business community, if you are serious and professional, there's really not much colonial baggage. I had an extremely practical relationship with the Secretary General of the Confederation of Indian Industry, I knew him on first name terms; I could ring him up and he would be as helpful as he could be. The relationship with the Government is much trickier. There are scars from the colonial legacy; there are those within the Government machine who will seek to exploit these and there's an element of treading on eggshells. I don't think I broke too many but it was labour-intensive and you couldn't take your eye off the ball. And there are all sorts of ways in which offence can be taken where none is meant. A particular issue is travel to the UK because of our strict visa regime. The Indians don't like it, and I wouldn't like it either. We put a huge effort into making it as humane and friction-free as we could but at peak periods we might issue twelve hundred visas in a day and it's going to be like a sausage factory. For frequent travellers we had a system whereby one could renew in absentia but still you've got to send in a passport and it needs a stamp in it and so on. So, there were all sorts of areas there where it was very easy to cause offence, and there was just a great deal of sensitivity.

In 2000, the Management Review Team came to look at us - what used to be known in earlier days as an Inspection was now called a Management Review. I was determined that we should really do this properly and so I designed a project called India 2000, and made all the posts commit into this and supply papers in a standard format so the Reviewers, when they arrived, knew exactly what we wanted and what we saw as our deficiencies and how they should be made good. We had them on the premises for a couple of months altogether, because of the need to visit the out-stations and so on, and I reckon we got 95% of what we wanted. I felt that that was time well invested to set the machine in the right direction.

And, it all seemed to be going quite well. We had a very interesting visit by Tony and Cherie Blair. We could have made much better use of it but there were only forty-eight hours in the Prime Minister's diary, apparently. India's worth more than forty-eight hours. One thing that particularly sticks in my mind was, we wanted him to give a speech on opportunities in the UK and so we produced a draft; and a series of increasingly gloomy drafts came back our way and we sought to polish them as best we could but we said this is not going to set the Ganges alight. And then, he, and I guess one or two close associates, completely re-wrote it on the plane from Seoul, and you could see what an able communicator he was. So, it was a success, although no thanks to the British bureaucracy. One interesting challenge was how to reach a wide audience in a country the size of India? And that was twenty years ago. Narrowcasting, where a lecture is given centrally and then piped electronically to groups of people in lecture rooms, round the country - that was relatively new in 2001. WIPRO, the Indian software house, could do this. So, he gave a lecture in Bangalore which was watched by a couple of dozen audiences across the country; you couldn't have done that in the UK at that stage, but you could in India. It was rather satisfactory to have been able to do that, and it's a lesson as to the strengths of the Indian IT revolution; that was why we had a Trade Commission in Bangalore – Bengaluru, as it's now known – just working with the Indian IT business. I think that was, perhaps, our most successful visit.

We used to get a lot of visitors particularly in January, when Parliament's on holiday and the UK's rather cold. I do recall on one occasion, we had so many Ministers that the Deputy High Commissioners were tied up and the High Commissioner was with somebody, and I found myself in Ahmedabad with an Education Minister. It was a useful visit, I don't deny it, but these things are quite expensive, in terms of resources, to pull programmes together, and it was quite striking what a lot one used to get when the weather was nice in India and not so nice in the UK.

Janet and myself, well, with the family, we managed to do quite a lot of travelling, see the major sites, the Taj Mahal, Bombay railway station, Cochin and so on, not perhaps as much as one would like to have done but, you know, there's a job to be done.

CM: And you enjoyed living there?

TM: I enjoyed living there but my wife, Janet, rather less so because she was struck with various Indian bugs. Whereas, I can claim in three and a half years not to have missed a day's work through sickness.

### **Governor, British Virgin Islands, 2002–06**

I was due to retire in November 2006 (October 2006 was actually the date on which the age bar was lifted) and, so, had time for one more job. So, in the autumn of 2002, I found myself Governor of the British Virgin Islands - a bit of the experience of colonial history, I suppose, from India, but an entirely new area of activity.

People's immediate reaction on hearing that one is, or has been, Governor of a Caribbean Island is that this must be a pretty easy number with a great deal of rum, sun and sailing. There's no doubt about it, the Caribbean Islands are delightful places to live but actually governing them is quite as much hard work as being Deputy High Commissioner in India.

I'd identify four reasons. First, a lack of really able people. In an island society, the prospects for the young and bright are inevitably constrained. You've only got to look at the way that the Western Isles have depopulated over the years. In the British Virgin Islands if you were a bright young engineer and wanted to stay there, the apogee of your career was actually going to be manager of the power station or Director of Public Works, for this is a population of thirty thousand. By UK standards, it's a small town. Now, of course, there's a great reluctance within those communities to admit this, but it's one that I've been increasingly interested in and to some extent it applies even here in the Lake District; there are not many serious professional jobs for youngsters to take up so they tend to leave.

The second is that as British Colonial policy developed, the bigger countries went first - India, Pakistan, Nigeria, Ghana - and some thought was given what to do, particularly about the Islands of the Caribbean, and we had something called the West Indies Federation which was a bright idea in the Colonial Office, but it failed and then Jamaica and Barbados and Trinidad went their own way. And then the smaller and smaller ones went until you're only left with the tiny overseas territories: Bermuda's the biggest, at sixty thousand; British Virgin Islands is thirty thousand; Montserrat's down to about four thousand, I think, now. But nobody really thought about what the long-term future with these is. There are aspirations for

independence but they know in their heart of hearts that this is not realistic. They are tied to the mother country's apron strings but rather regret it. An awful lot of time, the Island Government is trying to accrete more powers to itself and take them away from the Governor. They tend to say "Well, why should this man from London be looking after our police?" and so on, and I have a lot of sympathy for this. Equally, the UK takes responsibility for the territory's international affairs and security, and running the police force is quite an important part of the security. So, there's that consistent tension.

Third, there is no thinking, really, within the Foreign Office about where these places are going. Contrast that with what I was saying about Lithuania. We had a clear policy which was to get the Baltic States up to European speed, and members of the European Union and NATO and so on. That was what we were in business for. In India we needed to establish a sensible working relationship with a crucial trading partner and a world player. HMG has no idea what we want to do with the Overseas Territories, so there's a policy vacuum and the Governor has to make do as best he can.

Fourth, the salami-slicer on expenditure. There was a time when there was a frigate permanently stationed in the West Indies, and a Royal Fleet Auxiliary was there the whole time to provide back-up. Then it became shared with the Falkland Islands; now there's just a Royal Fleet Auxiliary most of the time during the hurricane season. That's just less support for the Governor, for the local Government, in the case of an emergency. There used to be senior UK-based civil servants in key jobs like Financial Secretary, Director of Health, Public Works at one stage, and these were levers that the Governor could use. They've all gone now, these jobs are occupied by locals, locals who may be competent but they perhaps might not see the world the same way as HMG or the Governor does.

So, what did I do? Well, the Governor is part of the Government. There's a local elected group of Ministers with a Premier, as he's now called, but the executive body is the Cabinet which the Governor chairs. So, quite a lot of my time was taken up with organising the business of Cabinet, because that's how you get the right things done and stop some of the wrong things being done. I was very closely involved with the Police. The Police was a challenge and, particularly, when a mutinous police constable attempted to murder the Commissioner and very nearly succeeded, and so the Commissioner had to be shipped out for hospitalisation and I had to find somebody else. I did have quite a difficult time with the

prison at one stage, when there was a riot inside the prison and the prisoners gained control. We were able to contain the perimeter for a limited period and there were quite difficult tactical decisions as to how you regain control of the prison with the limited number of police officers at your disposal – I had a hundred and sixty policemen, perhaps seventy or eighty could be marshalled for this one regaining control exercise – because, if you get it wrong, as I had to remind the Foreign Office, the nearest support is forty-eight hours away: a couple of plane loads of Metropolitan Policemen and some Royal Marines. So, you can't get it wrong; you've got to get your prison back first time, which we did.

Expenditure control is rudimentary, at least, and there is a great deal of misbehaviour over the matter of Government contracts. A lot of things cost a lot more than they ought to and money is disappearing sideways. It's very difficult to get a handle on that although one of my successors managed to establish a public enquiry which has led to police action. The money, of course, comes primarily from the off-shore banking, the international financial business - and the BVI promotes itself as an international finance centre. We know that while IFCs have some legitimate functions they are also exploited by those who wish to conceal the fact that they have got large pots of money here and there, and this is getting more difficult particularly ... currently in the UK when it is emerging that expensive houses in Mayfair are actually owned by shell companies in the British Virgin Islands. So, this goose that lays the golden eggs is becoming increasingly questioned, and it's the Governor who's got to do quite a lot of the questioning. So, some challenging issues.

On the other hand, it's a delightful place to live. We were extremely lucky that under my predecessor-but-one, the Governor's house had been condemned as unsafe and so my predecessor had taken a delightful villa which was our temporary lodgings for twelve months or so, and then we moved into a brand new Government house. And, to be fair, the Virgin Islands Government paid the bill. They'd built a new house for the Governor, at the cost of something over a million dollars, and the Foreign Office furnished it. So, we actually had – the only time in our career – a purpose-built house to do the job and it was brilliant that you could give a large dinner party for eighteen people round a table and there was enough room for the staff to serve and for guests to sit in the drawing-room afterwards. Or we had a reception hall next door where you could have two or three hundred. So, that was satisfactory and there was money available to do this sort of thing.

The people are delightful, and I put a lot of effort into cultivating public opinion because, of course, the Governor is seen to lack legitimacy; the Governor has been sent from London whereas the Premier, for all his faults, has been chosen by the people. So, the Governor has got to, or is well advised to, make sure that lots of people know what he looks like and preferably like him. We did a lot of work on that. I would not allow any public function to pass without being there if I possibly could. We used to go walking every morning round Road Town, before the sun gets hot, and people would know about this and sometimes they would come up and say “Governor, I think you ought to know...” Or, on one occasion, the road sweeping crew said, “Governor, when are we going to get our salary increase?” There was a young lady who asked me, “Why have you thrown my fiancé out?” I forget why we had thrown her fiancé out but there was extremely good reason. But people knew they could get access. So, that was interesting and rather fun. And, playing an active part in local societies: Rotary, the Anglican Church; my wife was Patron of the BVI HIV/AIDs Foundation: when we left, the Deputy Governor, who actually ran the Foundation, said that they’d been “Glad to have her as Patron. Normally Patrons are expected ‘to be’ and not necessarily ‘to do’ but Janet Macan has ‘done’, come to our meetings and helped with events.”

And then, of course, it’s a sailing centre and I’m a sailor. I bought a small cruiser with the intention of sneaking away for a quiet weekend, but actually it never happened. There was always something on at the weekend.

CM: Did you have visitors?

TM: Lots and lots of visitors. Visitors who one hadn’t heard of for many years would suddenly find it was convenient to come with their families! And, it was a reasonably big house so one could accommodate them. And, official visitors as well. I said earlier that the British Government was not terribly interested in the Overseas Territories and this tended to mean that turnover in the job of Minister for the Overseas Territories was high. So, one was constantly briefing a new Minister on what the issues were. Bill Rammell had previously been a local councillor in Harlow and I said to him, “Minister, this is a population of thirty thousand, that’s about half the population of Harlow where you used to be a councillor. Would you have given Harlow Town Council responsibility for primary legislation?” And, he said, “God, no, of course not.” “Well,” I said, “Minister, that’s your and my problem.”

We did have a nice visit by Princess Anne who came and opened the annexe to the hospital, and did various other things and was taken to view a sort of viewing platform in a mangrove swamp, and revealed herself extremely knowledgeable about mangroves, particularly in Vietnam. And, of course, we had quite a lot of sailing things involved. So, those sorts of visits were very welcome and they remind people that Brits are actually interested even if the Government really isn't.

And, then, when it was coming to an end I thought well shall I apply for an extension to take me up to my sixtieth birthday? And I discussed this with one or two colleagues in a similar situation and the message seemed to be that actually, "We want young Turks and not grey beards" and those who'd tried had not had success. So, I said, "OK, well, I'll go when you've got a successor" and then there was a delay over appointing my successor so that gave me another six months. Eventually we came home and I managed to persuade the Overseas Territories Directorate to put me on their books for the last three months or so, and I rewrote the manual for running the Overseas Territories. I deliberately made it unclassified because I thought there's no point in having a manual which you can't actually show to your host Government if you need to. So, I did it from here, I worked from home, with occasionally visits to London.

And, here, my IT odyssey comes full circle because having started in Bonn with setting up two linked PCs, I wrote this manual, drawing material from the Foreign Office electronically, rewriting it and then circulating it to a working group in Overseas Territories round the globe, dealing with editors, one in Dhaka and one in Johannesburg and then it finally emerged from the Foreign Office in London. You know, that's what you can do today. It was quite satisfactory – well, how many people have actually read this since I wrote it, I'm not sure. Anyway, it's gone on to the Foreign Office website and there you are.

I talked a bit about absence of a long-term strategy for the Overseas Territories. One of the things that I attempted to persuade the Office, without any success, was that there needs to be succession planning for Governors, because being a Governor is quite different from being an Ambassador or a High Commissioner. You'll do it a lot better if you've had prior experience in one of the junior jobs in a Governor's office, ten, fifteen years before. And, my predecessor was lucky enough to have been Governor of Montserrat and then Governor of the

BVI. Of course, it's quite difficult, there are only nine Governor slots but, nonetheless, the Foreign Office should be making the effort, and it isn't.

CM: Thank you very much indeed; that's fascinating.

TM: Is that what you want to know?