

BDOHP Biographical Details and Interview Index

John Anthony SANKEY (born 8 June 1930)

CMG 1983.

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

1st (Singapore) Regiment, RA (2nd Lieutenant), 1952	p 2
Colonial Office, 1953–61	pp 2-7
UK Mission to United Nations, 1961–64	pp 7-13
Foreign Office, 1964–68	pp 13-16
Guyana, 1968–71	pp 16-19
Singapore, 1971–73	p 19
NATO Defence College, Rome, 1973	p 20
Malta, 1973–75	pp 20-21
The Hague, 1975–79 (Governor, British School in the Netherlands)	pp 21-23
FCO, 1979–82	pp 23-28
High Commissioner, Tanzania, 1982–85	pp 28-33
UK Permanent Representative to UN Office, Geneva, 1985–90	pp 33-35

John (Anthony) Sankey CMG, PhD

interviewed in London on 19 April 2010 by Malcolm McBain

Education and National Service

MM: Could we start off with your telling us a little about your education and secondly your National Service?

JS: I was born in 1930 in Woolwich, south-east London. I came from a Catholic family, and went to Cardinal Vaughan School, a Catholic school in Kensington. From there I got a scholarship to Peterhouse at Cambridge University and studied Classics. I joined the army after Cambridge, which was unusual in those days as most undergraduates usually did their National Service first. I was in the OTC (Officer Training Corps) at Cambridge, so I got a fairly quick commission in the Royal Artillery. Having been born in Woolwich, the home of the Royal Artillery, that was a natural regiment to join. There was a vacancy for a Second Lieutenant in Singapore which attracted me because my grandfather had been in Singapore many years earlier.

When I arrived in Singapore in the summer of 1952 the Malayan 'emergency' (as it was called) was in full swing and General Sir Gerald Templer had just been appointed High Commissioner (his predecessor had been killed in a terrorist ambush). Singapore was a separate colony with its own governor, but much involved with what was happening on the mainland peninsula. I served in an anti-aircraft battery with Malay troops on the island of Blakang Mati (south of Singapore) and learnt to speak Malay. After six months I was posted to a searchlight unit in Kuala Lumpur. This operated in collaboration with the Royal Australian Air Force guiding night bombing missions, and also with the police in searching villages for terrorists. I became very interested in Malaya and its people and this changed my career.

Career decision to join the Colonial Office, 1952

I had earlier passed the Home Civil Service Exam and had said I'd like to go to the Ministry of Education, but having seen Singapore and Malaya I decided to join the Colonial Office. The Colonial Office was a London-based ministry which controlled policy towards the 40 plus colonial territories and was quite distinct from the Colonial Service, which actually administered the colonies on the ground. I joined the Colonial Office in 1953, which was quite a traumatic time.

The constitution of British Guiana had just been suspended, the Kabaka of Uganda had been exiled and the Mau Mau were in rebellion in Kenya. I was posted to the (then) tranquil Mediterranean Department and given responsibility for Malta and Cyprus.

Mediterranean Department of the Colonial Office, 1952-55

In 1952 Malta was the more politically active of the two; Cyprus was very quiet. An unknown cleric called Archbishop Makarios had recently been elected as the Ethnarch of Cyprus, but he was thought to be a moderate and no-one was expecting any trouble. Malta, on the other hand, was in the news. Britain had proposed that Malta should cease to be a colony, but should come under the Home Office and be treated like the Channel Islands or Northern Ireland. This was called the Home Office Offer. It eventually came to nothing because Mintoff demanded total integration, with Maltese MPs in Westminster and the NHS operating in Malta. By the time I finished in Mediterranean Department the emergency had broken out in Cyprus, and Malta took a back seat. Because of the involvement of Greece and Turkey in the Cyprus issue, I had a lot of dealings with the Foreign Office.

International Relations Department of the Colonial Office, 1955-58

In 1955 I moved on to International Relations Department of the Colonial Office, which handled colonial problems at the United Nations. The UN recognised two types of dependent territories. The trust territories were the old League of Nations mandated territories - Tanganyika, as it then was, the British Cameroons and British Togoland were administered by Britain. The majority of our colonies were regarded by the UN as 'non-self-governing territories'. My job was to attend meetings of the United Nations when our colonies were discussed; this meant the Fourth Committee of the General Assembly, the Trusteeship Council and the Committee on Information from non-self-governing territories.

MM: What rank did you have when you joined the Colonial Office?

JS: I joined as an Assistant Principal, which was the junior rank of the Administrative Grade, and I was an Assistant Principal in Mediterranean Department and in International Relations Department.

MM: You were dealing with pretty important subjects?

JS: Yes. I would be representing Britain in some of these committees, but obviously there was a superstructure above me, in particular the British Permanent Representative on the Trusteeship Council, Andrew Cohen, a former Governor of Uganda who had exiled the Kabaka of Uganda. He was a very lively man to work for.

MM: Indeed. Was there much administrative structure between you and him?

JS: Barry Gidden was the Counsellor for Colonial Affairs, so there was Cohen, Gidden and myself.

MM: That's rather impressive.

JS: It was a very exciting time for a young civil servant.

MM: What age were you then?

JS: I was 25 when I attended my first General Assembly.

MM: Those were the days. And you explained the important distinction between the Colonial Office and the Colonial Service. You had seen the Colonial Service in action in Malaya to some extent, I suppose, while you were doing your military service?

JS: There wasn't much contact, to be honest. We were mainly operational in the jungle, or on the fringes of the jungle, on a searchlight site, miles from anywhere. I can't say I saw much of the Colonial Service in Malaya, apart from the police.

MM: But when you got into the Colonial Office itself were you then conscious of the distinction?

JS: Very much so. There was a fundamental distinction. However, relations between us were very close. Colonial Service officers were regularly seconded to the Colonial Office (affectionately known as 'beachcombers') and every young entrant into the Colonial Office did a period in the colonies, in principle. But in practice, as I will be telling you, instead of doing my overseas stint in an actual colony, I went to New York as a member of the permanent mission, some time after I was in International Relations Department.

MM: So that was your beach?

JS: My beachcombing in reverse. I must also mention a most important fact about International Relations Department - I met my wife there. She was working in the room next door to mine.

Defence Department of the Colonial Office, 1958-61

I was promoted to Principal in 1958 and moved to Defence Department. In the 1950s Britain had numerous small colonial armies around the world – the King’s African Rifles in East Africa, the Royal West African Frontier Force, the Jamaica Regiment and so on. The force that was most lively in my time was the Aden Protectorate Levies. The British government was planning to stay in Aden for a number of years, as the Chiefs of Staff had decided (post-Suez) that Aden was vital for our defence and security. So the Colonial Office was busy raising extra battalions of the Aden Protectorate Levies and trying to squeeze the money out of the Treasury to pay for them. Another problem was that the War Office, having handed the King’s African Rifles over to the East African governments, decided to take back control of the forces, because ministers thought that the East African colonies were moving a bit too rapidly towards independence. This decision was actually welcomed by the Governors, because it meant that the War Office would pay for the forces and relieve the budgets of the colonies. I went to Kenya with a high-level War Office team led by Brigadier Ian Harris, who later became GOC in Northern Ireland, to work out the details of this transfer of control and where to establish barracks for the extra British troops that were going to be moved to Kenya. That was in 1959; but in the next year came the mutiny of the African troops in the Belgian Congo, and everything changed. By 1961 Tanganyika was independent and the rest is history. But during that two year period we were trying to turn the clock back and bring the King’s African Rifles under British control. This episode has been written about in obscure publications, but I don’t think it’s generally known.

MM: When we were responsible for the King’s African Rifles, how did that control manifest itself?

JS: We paid for them.

MM: Well, I can see that that’s a big lever, but were they working in the interests of Britain or of Kenya?

JS: The King's African Rifles was not just a Kenyan force but had battalions recruited in Uganda, Tanganyika, Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland. They were basically internal security forces, and they had an important role during the Mau-Mau rebellion. I think that KAR units from other colonies were moved into Kenya at the time. During the 1939-45 war they had served in Burma, but they weren't used outside Africa in the 1950s.

MM: It's very difficult at this time to look back and see what Britain was getting out of all that. I suppose that, in the case of the Aden Protectorate Levies, we were raising Arab troops to guard Aden as a transit port or coaling station – I suppose an oil station by the 1950s – a staging post on the shipping route to India and Australia.

JS: Aden was still an important link with our forces in the Far East, but in the late 1950s the main problem was Yemen. President Nasser of Egypt was very much controlling events in Yemen. Yemen was claiming not merely Aden but also the Aden Protectorate, the vast hinterland of Aden, which extended right up to Oman and Saudi Arabia. The British government were trying to support the local Arab sheikhs by expanding the Aden Protectorate Levies in the hope that they would oppose Yemen. It was like filling a bucket full of holes and with hindsight it was a total waste of time. Yemen was basically anti-Nasser. If only we'd backed the Yemenis against Nasser and offered to hand over the Protectorate to them, and had a plebiscite to endorse that idea, we would have saved ourselves a lot of anguish. After we left Aden in 1967 in some disorder – that was well after my time – Yemen took over anyway and the whole area is now part of Yemen. Aden was not one of our most glorious episodes. Most of our colonial actions were good, and justified, but Aden was unfortunately a series of errors.

In 1959, Duncan Sandys, the very active Defence Secretary, had a brainwave about Nigeria. Nigeria was approaching independence and Sandys thought we needed to retain a military base at Kano in the Northern region of Nigeria. Kano was an important staging post to the Far East in those days. So he suggested that we should carve out a chunk of Northern Nigeria, rather as we did with the sovereign base areas of Cyprus. The idea was to make a treaty with the leaders of Nigeria to secure UK rights there. In fact the Nigerians were clearly not prepared to have such a treaty, and we managed to persuade Sandys to drop the idea; but it kept the Colonial Office and the Ministry of Defence busy for quite a few months.

MM: That is particularly interesting because I interviewed a chap who had been the power behind the throne in Northern Nigeria for many years after independence and was completely trusted by the Emir of Kano - and indeed the Federal government in Lagos, and he told me how deeply implicated he had been in the policy of independent Nigeria. He'd been of course a Colonial Service man, not a servant of the British government.

JS: I think the impression outside the Colonial Office, while not an unnatural one, is that there was great antagonism between the ruled and the rulers; the oppressors and the oppressed; the Colonial Office and the unfortunate colonial subjects who were being ground down. In fact it was not that way at all. The colonies produced incredibly intelligent and able people, who were quite capable of negotiating, arguing and dealing with the Colonial Office on their own terms. It was very stimulating to work with them. Any idea that they regarded themselves as at all inferior or oppressed was quite wrong. As the story you were telling illustrates, many of these civil servants, British civil servants, stayed on as advisors for years after independence, although they kept a low profile - which is precisely why they were of special value and trusted. They were not anxious for the headlines.

MM: Yes, and served their local government faithfully and well to the best of their ability.

Posting to UK Mission to the United Nations, New York, 1961-64

JS: In 1961 I was transferred to the United Kingdom Mission to the United Nations, and that was instead of a secondment to one of the colonies. It was a three year posting. It was probably one of the most interesting assignments I had during my career. I was just 31 and I was directly advising Sir Hugh Foot, later Lord Caradon. Foot actually had two spells in New York. Most people remember him as Lord Caradon, Permanent Representative to the UN under the Labour Government, but they forget that he was British Representative to the Trusteeship Council for one year from 1961 to 1962, and that was when I was his adviser. Hugh Foot knew much about colonies, but not much about the UN, whereas I had already had three years' experience of the United Nations, as a member of the Colonial Office, and I knew a lot about UN procedures. He was a very good speaker, but basically he only had one speech. He made it to all sorts of audiences at different times and as it was a good speech it went down very well. It began with his experiences as a young district officer in Palestine in the 1930s all the way through to his governorship of Cyprus. Unfortunately he was at loggerheads with the British Government of Harold Macmillan over

Southern Rhodesia. He was happy representing the British point of view on colonial policy generally and stressed our determination to give our territories independence as soon as possible. This was a key issue as the Russians were pressing for immediate independence for all colonies. But Foot disagreed with Conservative policy towards Southern Rhodesia. We had managed to keep Southern Rhodesia off the agenda of the United Nations from 1945 until 1961, by claiming that it was not a 'non-self-governing territory' but a 'self governing territory', and therefore its affairs could not be debated by the United Nations. We got away with this until 1961, when the Russians persuaded the majority of UN member states that Southern Rhodesia was just another colony and that we were pulling the wool over the eyes of the UN. Hugh Foot then decided that he couldn't go on representing Britain in the UN as long as we were not planning to give independence to Southern Rhodesia under an African-majority government. So he resigned. It was a nine-day wonder and embarrassing for the Conservative Government. Foot subsequently joined the Labour party and when Harold Wilson came to power, he made Foot Lord Caradon, and a Minister of State in the Foreign Office, and sent him to the UN as Permanent Representative.

It was an exciting year, because we were fighting the UN on one side and Whitehall on the other. Because of Hugh Foot's delicate position I got an unexpected opportunity to represent Britain. The United Nations, under pressure from Russia and the newly independent African countries, passed a Declaration on Immediate Independence for all colonial countries and peoples. There was to be no argument about how big or how small they were; how prepared they were; whether they were rich or poor, divided or united. It didn't matter – they should all be independent immediately.

MM: So long as they were British.

JS: Not at all. It wasn't just British colonies. The Declaration on Immediate Independence applied to all dependent territories, whether British, French, Portuguese, etc. We were just one of a number, and we weren't regarded as the worst. The worst offenders were the Portuguese with Angola and Mozambique and the Belgians with the Congo. In 1962 a UN Committee on Decolonisation was established and Britain decided to join it so that we could defend our colonial record. The Committee's first decision was to go to Africa to hear 'petitioners' from the dependent territories. The argument was that many petitioners could not afford to get to New York, or that the colonial powers would not allow them to go to New York, so they decided that the Committee must go to Africa. In fact, it was a 'jolly'. The Committee didn't want to spend the whole summer sweating away in New York, so why not sample the delights of Africa? The Moroccan Government started

the ball rolling by inviting the Committee to Tangiers. This had been an autonomous free port, but Morocco had taken it over and its economy had slumped. No tourists went to Tangiers any more. So Morocco decided to promote Tangiers as a base for UN agencies in Africa, and the invitation to the Committee to have its first meeting there this was part of this campaign. The Committee then decided to go to Addis Ababa because the Organisation of African Unity had just established their headquarters there. And finally Tanganyika had just become independent and Nyerere said “Why not come to a Front Line State?”

The Committee had 17 member countries, mostly represented by their Permanent Representatives of Ambassadorial rank. Hugh Foot, for obvious reasons, did not want to go so I was appointed to be the British representative. It was a great honour and an interesting experience because the Committee wanted to discuss British colonies everywhere they stopped and I was in the hot seat.

MM: Indeed. Quite fascinating.

JS: Sir Hugh Foot was succeeded by Cecil King, who had been ambassador in Cameroun, and he did a very good job in a straightforward way as our Representative on the Trusteeship Council. The Ambassador was Sir Patrick Dean and my wife was social secretary to Lady Dean. In 1963 Sir Patrick recommended me for transfer to the Foreign Office from the Colonial Office. You didn't have to be a prophet to foretell that the British colonies were going to be independent quite soon, and that the days of the Colonial Office were numbered. The normal route was to go from the Colonial Office to the Commonwealth Relations Office, but I wasn't too keen to go into the Commonwealth Relations Office and this was a good chance to join the Foreign Office instead. I was one of the relatively few who went directly from the Colonial Office to the Foreign Office, rather than to the CRO.

MM: What had you against the CRO?

JS: The CRO did not know very much about the colonies. The CRO was formerly the Dominions Office. And the Dominions – our good friends in Canada, Australia and New Zealand – were a very different kettle of fish from the colonial territories.

MM: And Southern Rhodesia?

JS: Well, Southern Rhodesia was an anomaly. Not everyone was pleased with how the Dominions Office dealt with Southern Rhodesia, but what else could they do but let Godfrey Huggins do his own thing. Was that a good thing? I don't think so. The Dominions all wanted direct access to ministers in London. They didn't want to go through diplomats, so the Dominions Office was bypassed. When it came to dealing with the former colonies, the Dominions Office (by now the CRO) unfortunately had a vision, which I referred to earlier, that there was a terrible dichotomy between the Colonial Office (the rulers) and the colonies (the oppressed). They believed that the newly independent ex-colonies would not want Colonial Office people, or Colonial Service people, dealing with their affairs. They felt that there would be animosity. The CRO preferred to recruit army officers, teachers, or you name it, rather than employing Colonial Office people and using their expertise. The leaders of the former colonies must have been bewildered: they had been dealing for years with people in the Colonial Office, and when they became independent they suddenly found themselves dealing with strangers in the Commonwealth Relations Office and they would say "Where are all our friends? What's happened to Joe Bloggs? What's happened to Jack Smith? Who are these people who know nothing about Nigeria?"

I can tell you a story, which illustrates the point. The Commonwealth Relations Office decided to set up its own telegraphic system for the new British missions in independent Nigeria. There was a Federal Government in Lagos and regional governments in the Western, Northern and Eastern regions. The CRO sent a telegram to all posts and it was copied to the Colonial Office. It said "We've decided on the telegraphic addresses for the new High Commission and Deputy High Commission posts in Nigeria. They will be Fednig, Westnig, Northnig and Eastnig". My case rests. [laughter]

MM: Oh dear! But then a lot of people came into the CRO via technical assistance, and there were large numbers of Colonial Service people who were specialist advisers in various fields.

JS: I hasten to say I'm talking about a very limited time – the early 1960s. I'm not talking about what happened after 1966. I'll give you another specific example. There was a Colonial Office man, a good friend of mine, who was one of the relatively few to be accepted by the CRO. He was a First Secretary in post in Dar es Salaam, when our UN Committee was going there.

MM: Ian Buist?

JS: No, it was Peter Carter. As one does with colleagues, I sent him a telegram saying “I’m coming out with this UN Committee in two weeks’ time and I hope to see you.” Normally a colleague would respond and say “Come and stay with me”. But I didn’t hear a word from him. So I just stayed in an hotel in Dar es Salaam with the other delegates. However, I had to report daily to London and receive urgent instructions, so I needed access to the High Commission and to send and receive telegrams. This had not been a problem in Addis Ababa. But in Dar I had great difficulty getting into the High Commission and or even seeing Peter Carter. I finally did so and said “Peter, what is going on?” He said “It’s terrible here - the CRO has sent instructions that we are to have nothing to do with the UN Committee”. I said “For goodness sake, I’m the UK representative on the Committee. I need instructions. I need to use your facilities. You can’t treat me like a pariah”. “Oh well, I’ll have to tell the High Commissioner”. It took me hours to sort this out, so different from Addis, where the British Embassy immediately welcomed me in, offered all facilities and invited me to the Queen’s Birthday Party. Although I knew no-one there they immediately regarded me, correctly, as one of them. That experience in Dar es Salaam was the last straw. I came back and said to my wife “Look. I’m not going to have anything to do with the CRO if I can help it. I will apply to transfer to the Foreign Office”. And that’s how it happened.

MM: That’s very interesting.

JS: The troublesome Declaration of Immediate Independence for all colonies put the Russians in a popular position with the Africans, and we were always trying to knock them off their perch. There were two key speeches which I helped to draft. The first was for Sir Patrick Dean in the plenary debate in the General Assembly on this Declaration. The Russians always got terribly upset if anyone referred to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and the other Soviet ‘autonomous republics’. This may now seem incredible, but it was a fact. The Russians said “These republics are integral parts of the Soviet Union. Under the UN Charter you’re not allowed to discuss the internal affairs of the Soviet Union, and you must not do it”. Anyway we said to Patrick Dean “Give it a go”.

Patrick Dean made a very good speech along these lines: “In 1856, Britain occupied Ceylon. In the same year the Russians occupied Kazakhstan. Ceylon became independent in 1947. When is Kazakhstan going to be independent?” He went through all the Soviet territories by date and contrasted them with what was happening in our colonies. The Russian delegate was jumping up and down in his seat with rage, so the speech really did draw blood. The other speech was by Cecil King, whom I mentioned earlier. We said “Let’s look at this requirement for colonies to be handed

over to the indigenous inhabitants – the people who were there before the settlers arrived. Let's have a bit of fun". So King gave what we called the 'dodo speech'. He pointed out that the original inhabitants of Mauritius were dodos, and that the colony was later peopled by immigrants from Britain, France and Asia. How could they hand over Mauritius to the indigenous residents when the dodos were extinct? It was not a wildly funny joke but it went down very well in the UN.

MM: Did we insist that the Russians would only have one vote at the United Nations?

JS: No we didn't. They had three votes.

MM: Three votes?

JS: The Russians wanted votes for every Soviet republic, but as a compromise they were allowed to have votes for the Soviet Union, Byelorussia and Ukraine. So they actually had three votes. There was one amusing incident. In the alphabetical order Ukraine and the USSR sat next to each other – so coordination was easy – but Byelorussia was with the "Bs" on the other side of the chamber. Normally they had instructions, but there was a snap vote on one occasion when the chairman drew out the first country to vote from a hat. It was Byelorussia. The Byelorussian delegate turned pale. He peered across, trying to see any signal from the Soviet delegate. Of course the Soviet delegate didn't want to appear to be influencing the 'independent' Byelorussian, so he just sat pokerfaced. So the Byelorussian said "Yes", but when it was the turn of the Ukrainian and Soviet Union they both said 'No' very firmly. The poor Byelorussian clearly felt he was going to be shot. [laughter]

MM: Interesting insight into those early days ...

JS: In 1955 when I first went to the UN as a visiting member of the Colonial Office, there were only 60 members of the UN, and 20 of them were Latin Americans, so the Latin American bloc was incredibly important. Everyone had to be nice to the Latin Americans. There were virtually no African states apart from Ethiopia. Furthermore, there were virtually no European states. People have forgotten that Russia was vetoing Italy, Germany and Spain while we were vetoing Poland, Hungary etc. In 1955 there was an agreement to let everybody in and suddenly UN membership jumped to over 100, and later all the African states came in. So by the time I went back in 1961 the Afro-Asian states took the lead in anti-colonial rhetoric and the Latin Americans appeared rather old fashioned and conservative.

MM: Amazing how things change.

JS: I left New York as a member of the Foreign Office, so I never went back to the Colonial Office. I was succeeded in New York by Brian Barder – an old Colonial Office friend.

Western Organisations and Co-ordination Department in the Foreign Office, 1964-68

JS: On joining the Foreign Office I was posted to Western Organisations and Co-ordination Department. Its head was John Barnes. The ‘western organisations’ were NATO, the Council of Europe and the Western European Union, a group of six countries established on the initiative of Anthony Eden in 1954 to supervise West German rearmament. The three western zones of Germany had been united to form the Federal Republic of Germany, and we were arming them to be ready to resist a Russian invasion; but we wanted the German armed forces to be under allied control, so that we did not have another Hitler running amok. The Western European Union locked West Germany into a close association with Britain, France and the Benelux countries, and an arms control agency supervised German factories to ensure that they didn’t build submarines, or warships above a certain tonnage, or nuclear or chemical weapons. The treaty also bound Britain to keep 55,000 troops in Germany – the British Army of the Rhine. We’ve forgotten about this now, but it was quite important at the time. The Western European Union had its headquarters in London and I was one of the British representatives. In addition to the western organisations, there was also ‘co-ordination’, which gave John Barnes the chance not only to see all the telegrams that came into and went out of the Foreign Office and but also to intervene by writing comments on them as he saw fit. Of course other Heads of Department didn’t see it in quite the same light, but certainly it gave John Barnes a wide mandate. His particular interest in those days was international co-operation in arms production. I handled this with Bryan Gould as my assistant – he later became a prominent figure in the Labour Party – and the work expanded so quickly that it (and Gould) were hived off to a separate department. Co-ordination was also deemed to cover speechwriting. If a speech involved more than one Department it became the responsibility of WOCD to write it. The same applied to the Permanent Under-Secretary’s monthly letter. Each month the Permanent Under-Secretary would write to all ambassadors to tell them what had happened in the previous month (in case they’d missed it), and to forecast what was likely to happen. Somebody had to draft it and that was my job in WOCD. I’d first see the PUS and find out what was on his mind. Then I would go round the Departments and say “I need a paragraph on Vietnam (or Russia or oil supply problems)”.

The much underestimated Michael Stewart was the Foreign Secretary. I don't like to admit it, but my recipe for drafting a routine *tour d' horizon* speech for the Foreign Secretary was never to say anything that had not been said before. If you wrote something new – a) it might be wrong or b) it might upset someone. If it had been said previously and there was an outcry, one could say “but the Foreign Secretary said this months ago in Droitwich (or in Parliament or at the United Nations). What's the problem?” That's exactly what happened on one occasion during the Vietnam War, which Harold Wilson was cleverly keeping us out of. I put in a phrase about the ‘special relationship’ between Britain and the United States. It just hit the headlines on a day when not much else was happening and immediately there was a huge fuss about the surprise new policy statement by Stewart proclaiming a ‘special relationship’ with America. I was able to point out the fact that Stewart had said the same thing six weeks before so it wasn't new at all. It did mean that Stewart's speeches could be rather dull, but that's exactly what the government wanted at that time. We were just trying to keep the temperature down.

MM: John Barnes was a bit of a Europhile, was he not?

JS: Yes, he was keen on Europe, but so were we all.

MM: It was policy in those days.

JS: I still am keen on Europe. I just cannot understand - and it makes me extremely angry - the way that Europe is treated by the Conservatives. My generation remember the 1939-45 War. I was too young to fight in the War but I saw the Battle of Britain being fought in the skies over Kent and have cartridge cases to prove it. My generation knows about war and that a main aim in our foreign policy must be to avoid another war with Germany. We've had two wars between 1914 and 1945, why should there not be a third? We must stop that happening. And the best way to do so was to bind Germany into a united Europe with France, Benelux, and ourselves. The Western European Union paved the way for the European Union and I cannot understand anyone wanting to unravel it. It seems to me that a united Europe is fundamental; it means that never again will we fight the Germans - or the French. The young say ‘Fight the French? Ha, ha, ha’. But why shouldn't we be wary of fighting the French? We spent 900 years fighting the French and 50 years fighting the Germans so we need to put in place an arrangement to prevent us fighting them in the future. European Union seems to me the best guarantee of peace. It also brings us a lot of other advantages, if only we are sensible about it.

MM: Economic ones, for example.

JS: Yes. Why did we not join the Euro? What's so good about the Pound. It's losing its value like a Tanzanian shilling. The Euro is going to have difficulties – we're all going to have economic difficulties, but we're not escaping them by being on our own. We should back the Euro, not criticise it. So I remain very strongly pro-European. John Barnes was not, I would say, one of the leading pro-Europeans at that time. WOCD didn't have too much to do with the EU. That was dealt with by other departments. But yes – he was certainly pro-Europe. He went on to be Ambassador in Israel and then to The Hague, and I'll come to that in a little while.

MM: Thank you for that. Do you have anything else you want to say about your time in your introduction to the Foreign Office? How about its method of working?

JS: I did not regard the Foreign Office method of working as efficient as the Colonial Office. That might come as a surprise – let me explain. There are 'internal inspections' in the Foreign Office and WOCD had one during my time. The internal inspector asked the same question about methods of work and I said, "In the Colonial Office new entrants were given much more responsibility. A Head of Department had two Principals (First Secretary equivalent). Each Principal normally had two Assistant Principals (Third Secretary), or one Assistant Principal and one HEO (Second Secretary). When I got to WOCD at the Foreign Office I found they had a Head of Department, an Assistant Head of Department and then a sea of desk officers called 'the Third Room'. Some of the desk officers might be quite senior, some would be new arrivals, and it seemed quite chaotic. The Assistant never knew quite what he was doing. If he had a workaholic Head of Department, like John Barnes, he had nothing to do. If he had an idle Head of Department he was doing everything. Usually he only came into his own when his boss went on leave, and it seemed to me to be a terrible system. I told the inspector that, and I said – "Keep this confidential". He said "Oh yes. It's like a secret of the confessional". He then went to lunch with John Barnes and in the afternoon Barnes burst into my room and roared: "What's all this about Assistants?" [laughter] So much for the secrets of the confessional! But even though the Foreign Office didn't have a very good system, my Foreign Office colleagues were a very likeable lot. Contrary to what one expected they were not all ex-Etonians, though I had some Etonian friends, including Antony Acland, who was with me in New York as a First Secretary. A lot of senior people had come up, as it were, 'through the ranks'. They'd not been to university; not been to public school and it didn't really matter. Nobody

bothered. It was whether the chap did a good job or not. Another attractive feature about being in the Foreign Office in those days was our prestige in Whitehall. If you attended a Whitehall committee meeting and you were from the Foreign Office, the other ministries listened to you and wanted to know what your view was. And that was very good for morale.

In due course George Brown took over from Michael Stewart and John Margetson, whom you may have interviewed, took over the speechwriting. I attended a NATO ministerial meeting as one of George Brown's advisors and his well-known liking for alcoholic refreshment caused some problems. But he was certainly a character. Michael Stewart was a much more urbane Foreign Secretary, but you don't hear any funny stories about him.

Posting to British High Commission, Guyana, 1968-71

In 1968 I was sent to Georgetown, Guyana, formerly British Guiana. There were two main problems in Guyana in 1968. The first and major one was the threat from Venezuela. The Venezuelans had a longstanding and not very well founded claim to the Rupununi – a large but sparsely populated area west of the Essequibo River. Geographically, Guyana is a curious country. The coastal strip around Georgetown is largely below sea level, and is protected from flooding by dykes and sea walls originally built by the Dutch. This reclaimed land is used for growing sugar, and that was the main export. About 30 miles south there is firmer land where the Americans built a big airbase during the War as part of the famous Churchill/Roosevelt bases-for-destroyers deal. After the War the airbase became Guyana's airport, but it was a long way from Georgetown. Nearby was the McKenzie bauxite mine. So Guyana's main exports were bauxite and sugar. Further south was the Rupununi, which borders on Venezuela and Brazil. This was where the Amerindian people, the original inhabitants of Guyana, lived, and it was an area practically cut off from Georgetown and the coast. There were also a few settlers - some English, some from other European countries. The settlers had established cattle ranches, and there was a rather Wild West atmosphere in Lethem, the main town of the Rupununi with about eight buildings in it, including a small police station. Jesuit missionaries, mainly English, were active and most of the Amerindians were Catholics. The Venezuelans decided to use some local discontent as an excuse to provide a group of the wilder settlers with guns and start a little rebellion.

It was a racial thing. The settlers were white. They didn't like the idea of Burnham, who was of African descent, being Prime Minister of Guyana and so they decided to declare independence for

Rupununi. Their plan was to take over the police station, which they thought would surrender as there were only three or four policemen. But the police resisted, shots were exchanged, and unfortunately a police sergeant was killed. So instead of being a political demonstration it became a murder case. The government acted very quickly. A British officer, Colonel Pope, was head of the army. There was no air force so he commandeered the ancient Dakota normally used for flying dead cattle to Georgetown, loaded the aircraft with troops and landed at Lethem before the rebels had time to organise themselves. So it was literally a nine hours rebellion; but it had serious consequences because it made the government highly suspicious of the local Amerindians and also of everybody who was in the area at the time, including the Jesuits.

One young British chap, a backpacker, was among those arrested. I was sure that he had nothing to do with the rebels – he just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. He was put into Georgetown prison, which is not one of the nicest places in the world. I was Acting High Commissioner at the time and I went to see the Minister of Home Affairs, Desmond Hoyte – he succeeded Burnham as President later. I said “Minister, I’m quite sure this young man had nothing to do with the rebellion and I’m sure you don’t believe it either. I know you have to keep him for a while, but he’s having a bad time in prison. May I just take him out for a couple of hours, give him a decent meal and a shower, and that will really restore his morale.” Hoyte smiled and said “Okay High Commissioner, you can do it”. So I drove to the prison and entirely on my ‘parole’ took him away for a few hours. Of course he might have tried to run away but I had confidence in him. We drove away in the official car with the Union Jack flying back to my house; he had a shower and a meal and brightened up considerably. I delivered him back to the jail and two days later he was released.

This can be paralleled in many other countries – this is what British High Commissions, Consulates and Embassies can sometimes do with the right contacts. Sometimes they can’t. I was dealing with a very good Minister, so I was lucky.

MM: It’s all right if there aren’t too many people getting into trouble. I think part of the problem these days is that you’ve got widespread bad behaviour by all kinds of wretched people, and how can we possibly be expected to get them out of jail etc?

JS: Loutish behaviour in Greek resorts or Spain must be a nightmare with the numbers involved. In the particular circumstances of Guyana, my initiative worked, but I quite agree with you, it doesn't work like that most of the time.

MM: You were Acting High Commissioner at the time. What was your actual appointment?

JS: I was Deputy High Commissioner and Head of Chancery in Georgetown. My first High Commissioner was Ken Ritchie, later High Commissioner in Zambia, and his successor was Bill Bates, who went on to be Ambassador in Korea. Bates was a great cricketer.

MM: He was also ex-Colonial Office?

JS: Bates was ex-Commonwealth Relations Office. The problem with Venezuela was cleverly handled by the Attorney General (and de facto Foreign Minister) of Guyana, Sonny Ramphal - who later became Commonwealth Secretary General. He masterminded the Protocol of Port of Spain, which put the whole dispute about the Rupununi on ice for ten years. Ken Ritchie handled this matter himself and I can't claim to have had much to do with the Protocol of Port of Spain. But because he was so involved with the Protocol, Ritchie gave me everything else to deal with, including the aid programme. Our main project was rebuilding the sea wall near Georgetown. Another major issue was that Guyana changed from being a monarchy to a republic, and this had a tragic result. The Governor General, Sir David Rose, had previously been Federal Defence Officer for the West Indies, so I knew him from when I was in the Colonial Office. Rose was due to become the first President of Guyana when it changed from being a monarchy to a republic. So he came to London to see the Queen and talk about the constitutional changes, and the West Indian Committee gave him a lunch in a London club. The club had recently been redecorated and there was a mass of scaffolding outside which being dismantled. After lunch David Rose paused at the entrance to say goodbye to his host and a massive section of scaffolding fell down and crushed him to death instantly. It was a great tragedy, because he was a very good man.

In 1970 I was offered a transfer back to London to be an Assistant head of department. You know my views on Assistants, and I didn't want to go back to London as a First Secretary. Personnel Department said that if I did another year in Georgetown I would then leave on promotion, so I stayed on in Guyana. In 1971 was offered promotion to Counsellor as the Joint Intelligence Committee representative in Singapore. This title meant nothing to me, but I thought "It's

promotion and it's Singapore, so it can't be too bad". I was transferred directly and spent only a few weeks in London en route. Little did I know that in the next four years I was to serve in four cities – Singapore, Rome, Valletta and The Hague – and lived in eight different houses!

Transfer on promotion to Counsellor in Singapore, 1971-73

The situation in Singapore was that Far East Command was being abolished. It was a very grand institution, with an Air Chief Marshal as C-in-C, supported by various generals and admirals and advised by a Political Adviser, Reg Hibbert. In 1971 it was decided to replace Far East Command with something called ANZUK – the Australia/ New Zealand /United Kingdom Force. An Australian admiral would be in command, with a New Zealand deputy to command the Air Force and British deputies to command the Army and Navy at a lower level – brigadiers rather than generals. At first it was planned to abolish the Political Adviser post, but it was later decided to have someone called the JIC London Representative in Singapore, which was my role. Now the problem was twofold. First, I was attached to the High Commission. Sam Falle was the High Commissioner. He had been Head of Southern European Department in the Foreign Office when I was dealing with Cyprus and Malta, so we knew each other and I thought I was going to get a warm welcome. In fact he resisted the appointment. It was not personal. It was simply that he'd got a perfectly good Counsellor (John Watt) already and he didn't want an extra one who would need office space and a car and P.A. etc. Of course I didn't know about this when I accepted the job. Second, there wasn't really very much work to do. As the head of ANZUK was an Australian admiral, he relied primarily on my Australian opposite number, the Australian Deputy High Commissioner, Malcolm Lyon, who was Chairman of the ANZUK Intelligence Group. I was Secretary of the Group, but there wasn't much happening in the intelligence world, so it was something of a non-job. What I did do (legitimately, but also to fill in time) was to visit the ANZUK area. I made a point of going up to Kuala Lumpur once a month because I got useful information about what was happening in eastern Malaysia (Sabah and Sarawak). I managed to visit Sarawak, as well as Canberra and Wellington (to talk to the JIC people there), and Bangkok to attend a SEATO – South East Asia Treaty Organisation – meeting. After 18 months I was due to go home on mid-tour leave. By then Australia was coming up to an election. Gough Whitlam announced that if elected he would abolish ANZUK. He considered it a waste of time and money and I think he was quite right. So with Whitlam on the horizon, I said to London "I don't think this ANZUK job is a good use of my talents and it seems likely to be abolished; so instead of coming

back after mid-tour leave, can you find me something else?” And the FCO said “What about Malta?”

Posting to British High Commission, Malta, via NATO Defence College in Rome, 1973-75

Malta had the attraction for me that my first job in the Colonial Office had been Mediterranean Department. I'd never actually been there, so I agreed to go. The FCO then said “There's only one problem; the post is not becoming vacant until September”. It was then January. It was normal for the FCO, after one had innocently agreed to a posting, to say either that you were needed at your next post in a great hurry (as with Singapore), so that there was no chance of a proper leave in London; or that you were not needed for nine months. Fortunately the FCO had the perfect solution - they sent me to the NATO Defence College in Rome for six months. I couldn't have asked for more and off I went to Rome with the family. We had a little villa on the Via Appia Antica, and it was six months of paradise, living in Rome (my favourite city) and doing very interesting trips with the Defence College to North America and Scandinavia. Being in Rome was also a sensible preparation for Malta, because the British Embassy in Rome received all the telegrams about Malta, knew the problems with Mintoff, made me welcome and gave me a spare desk. And the NATO Defence College were pleased because the Foreign Office tended to use the College as a way to park people for six months before they were sent off to Japan or Paraguay, so having someone who was actually going to a post in the NATO area was almost a first.

MM: What was your appointment in Malta?

JS: I was a Counsellor with the title of Deputy High Commissioner and Head of Chancery. My first High Commissioner was John Moreton, who later went to Washington as Deputy Ambassador. He was another ex-Colonial Office man. He was succeeded by Robin Haydon, whom I knew well in New York from 1961-4 when we had both been First Secretaries. He was ten years older than me, so he was now High Commissioner and I was his deputy. We got on well but frankly Malta was too small - either of us could have done the job as High Commissioner in Malta with one hand tied behind our back, but for two of us to be there was too much. My main job was to keep the British military happy. Mintoff had recently expelled the NATO headquarters (which in fact was composed mainly of British units) to prove he was not a 'Western puppet'. For a very brief period there were no foreign troops, ships or aircraft in Malta. But Mintoff needed the revenue from the military (and their families), so he graciously invited the British to come back on the understanding

they had nothing to do with NATO. Of course it was all a fiction, but the arrangement suited HMG at the time and Mintoff got quite a lot of money for Malta. The British military set-up was reminiscent of ANZUK in Singapore, with a Rear-Admiral in command, an Air-Commodore as his deputy and the senior army man was a brigadier. My job was to smooth over any problems between the British Forces and the Maltese Government.

Posting to The Hague as Deputy Head of Mission, 1973-75

After I had been in Valletta for about 16 months I got a call from Richard Parsons, head of Personnel Department and a friend from WOCD days. He said “We’ve got a problem. There is a vacancy at The Hague for the Counsellor post. We’ve proposed several candidates but John Barnes has rejected them all. As you worked for him in WOCD and he knows you, would you be willing to have your name put forward?” For some people working once for John Barnes was more than enough. He was brilliant in many ways but could also be really difficult. I had a particular rapport with him because he was a great exponent of accurate writing and a lover of the Classics, while I was quite good at drafting and had a Classics degree, and we got on reasonably well together. I needed experience of the European Community. So I rejoined John Barnes but, to be honest, it was not a very demanding job.

MM: Really?

JS: John Barnes himself said “The European Union is really undermining, to some extent, the role of Ambassadors and Embassies”. I told you earlier that the old Dominions didn’t feel they needed the Dominions Office because they had direct access to Whitehall. The Minister of Agriculture in New Zealand would fly to London and deal with the Minister of Agriculture in Whitehall. He wouldn’t ask the High Commissioner to pass a message. It is the same with Europe. If the Dutch Minister of Transport had a problem with landing rights at Heathrow, he’d phone his British opposite number or fly to London; he wouldn’t ask the Embassy to do it. In 1976 Sir Kenneth Berrill was asked to report on the efficiency of the Foreign Office and its missions abroad. When he came to The Hague, Barnes told him “All you need in many posts is an Ambassador, a very good PA [those were the days before computers] and someone to look after the files. You don’t need a big staff because so much of what the ambassador does is by personal contact at the highest level”. As so often, Barnes overstated the position; but he had a point. So much business within the EU is done directly by technical ministries that the role of an Embassy is diminished.

Despite this, I enjoyed The Hague. The Netherlands is crammed with history, art and culture and we made good friends with many Dutch people and diplomats. The average non-diplomat Dutchman is reserved at first as he gets tired of making friends with Brits who move on after a couple of years. I was fortunate to stay at The Hague for four years, so we got to know the Dutch well. They are very appreciative of anyone who is interested in their history and this gave me an idea. When John Barnes was leaving I had to make a farewell speech; and as he'd been in Holland for five years - which seemed quite a long time - I thought it might be a record. When I looked up the list of British Ambassadors to The Hague, I found that one Ambassador had been *en poste* for 41 years, so I quickly forgot about five years being a record. But I was fascinated by the famous people on the list, like George Downing of Downing Street, Chesterfield of the sofa, the Earl of Sandwich, the Duke of Marlborough - all these people had been Ambassadors to The Hague in the past. I worked up a little presentation with slides and gave talks to branches of the Anglo-Dutch Society and other audiences, and this helped promote Anglo-Dutch relations.

Richard Sykes succeeded Barnes in 1977 and by then I was quite keen to get back to London. I realised I had to serve as a Head of Department before I became an AUS, so the sooner I got back the better. Richard Sykes said "Look, I've just arrived. I need you for at least six months, possibly a year". So I stayed at The Hague until March 1979, and my successor was Roger Hervey. As usual there was no overlap - I left and Hervey was due three weeks later. Hervey arrived in the evening and as it was late he didn't go to the Embassy or see the Ambassador, but just went to his hotel. The very next morning Richard Sykes was assassinated. Hervey never met him and took over as Chargé having been in the country for twelve hours. Ironically I'd been four years in the country ready to take over in an emergency and nothing untoward had occurred. I offered to go back and help, but as I expected the answer was "No." Hervey was the right man in the right job and he did very well.

MM: Before we leave Holland, you said earlier that John Barnes put forward this idea that the function of ambassadors was being reduced inside the EU. I can see that there's quite a lot of force in that, and now we're in a dire economic situation where we're going to have to reduce expenditure very considerably in the not too distant future. Do you not think that we could in fact reduce Foreign Office expenditure on some of the things that they seem to be doing these days? Do you think we could reduce our representation in many countries?

JS: I must confess I'm out of the loop now, as I've been retired 20 years and I don't know the current staffing levels of Embassies. From what I read in *Password*, it sounds as if there is a very dramatic process of cutting down; but in my view they may be cutting the wrong way. Rather than closing posts, they should be making posts smaller. John Barnes went too far in saying staff could be reduced to an Ambassador, a PA and one other. On the other hand, there are often unnecessary staff, because, once you get beyond a certain level, then the administrative staff are administering themselves. Where I think the FCO may have gone wrong is to close posts like your own in Madagascar. There is nothing a country hates more than for Britain to be represented by an Ambassador living in a neighbouring country, because invariably you hate your neighbours. When Madagascar has an Ambassador in Paris and accredits him to London also, he gets a pretty frosty welcome on his occasional visits to London. I am not sure who covers Madagascar now, but I have heard it is our man in Mauritius. Now for a huge island to be covered by a man from tiny Mauritius is not tactful. There's nothing wrong with the Ambassador personally and Mauritius is a very respectable country; but it's got nothing to do with Madagascar. Much better than having six people in Mauritius would be to have three in Mauritius and three in Madagascar, and the same goes for other parts of the world. To have someone in Guyana looking after Surinam was not tactful. This idea of accrediting people to neighbouring countries is a mistake. In Rome, the Vatican refuse to accept an ambassador who is also accredited to Italy and resident in Rome. Britain is sailing close to the wind in insisting that the very good man we've got there now be based in our Embassy to Italy. That is not tactful. People keep quiet about it, but it sends quite the wrong message. So my view is that posts could be made smaller, particularly with computerisation, but they should not be closed. It's much better to spread people thinly, than to have big concentrations or 'hubs'. A hub is a bad thing, so that's my message for the Foreign Office – 'Small is good'.

Posting to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 1979-82

In the autumn of 1978 the FCO offered me a job in London as Head of Central African Department. As usual, there was a catch. After I had accepted the offer, I looked in the directory and found there was no Central African Department. The FCO then admitted it would be a new department - I would have to start from scratch.

Normally FCO departments dealt with several countries. But Rhodesia was such a complex political issue that it had a department to itself - Rhodesia Department. The other 12 countries in the area, including South Africa and Namibia, were handled by Central and Southern Africa

Department. As Rhodesia was expected to become independent before too long, the FCO decided to hive off Angola, Mozambique, Burundi, Ruanda, Zaire and Zambia into a new Central African Department, which would in due course also be responsible for an independent Rhodesia. This was my new job and I arrived in London just as the Labour Government of Jim Callaghan was defeated. David Owen marched out of the Foreign Office, taking with him his Political Adviser, and I swiftly moved into the Adviser's vacant office.

MM: Was it Evan Luard? or David Lipsey?

JS: It could have been. I never met him, but whoever he was he left a perfectly good office and I occupied it so that I could have a base to operate from. The new Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary was Lord Carrington and as far as I remember he never had much time for Political Advisers. I then had to create a department, gathering people around me and finding offices for them. Soon afterwards John Willson, who was Special Counsellor for African Affairs and looked after the OAU and meetings of EU and NATO experts on Africa, was posted and I was given his responsibilities, so I was then Special Counsellor for African Affairs as well as being Head of Central Africa Department. Finally Rhodesia became independent as Zimbabwe in 1980 so my final move was to take over Robin Renwick's office. And the first thing I did was to visit Angola, Mozambique, Zambia and Zaire. I can claim some credit for a "U" turn by Margaret Thatcher on Mozambique. One of the pledges of the Conservative election manifesto in 1979 had been to stop the 'scandal' of giving aid to Marxist states such as Mozambique. Judith Hart in the last Labour Government had given a lot of aid to Mozambique after they'd become independent from Portugal in 1974. For Mrs Thatcher, who was very good at telling black from white, Mozambique was definitely black. I knew nothing about Mozambique and to my amazement the people I met there wanted closer relations with Britain and with Europe. I said "What about your ally, the Soviet Union? What about Marxism?" They replied: "That's just window dressing. We had to be Marxist to get weapons - no NATO country would give us arms to fight Portugal. Nor would the Russians give arms to a pro-Western country - so we had to be Marxist". They added: "Machel was Marxist, but now he's keen on closer relations with Europe; when can we sign the Lomé Convention?" I had to explain that until Portugal joined the European Union, Mozambique could not join Lomé - but that their time would come. Little did I know that in due course Mozambique would join the Commonwealth! There was much criticism of Russian and East German technical aid - the Russians were over-fishing Mozambican waters and stealing their shrimps, while the Eastern German combine harvesters broke down after a few days because they couldn't manage the terrain.

Later Machel scored quite a few brownie points with Christopher Soames, the Governor of Rhodesia. Machel was very helpful in getting Mugabe's guerrilla fighters disarmed and returned to Rhodesia. He even sent Soames boxes of shrimps. So following these favourable reports on Mozambique, my proposal to invite Chissano, then the Foreign Minister, to visit England was accepted; he even met Mrs Thatcher. Machel himself later paid a State Visit and got on very well with Mrs Thatcher, but it was after I'd left the Department. So Mozambique was one of the few cases when Mrs Thatcher did a U-turn and I played a part in that. When Machel was later killed in an air crash caused by the South Africans, Chissano took over as President.

MM: Machel was killed by the South Africans?

JS: Yes. Maputo is very close to the South African border and South African intelligence agents arranged some fake radio signals which caused Machel's plane to crash, and Machel was killed. I don't know if it's ever been proved, but that is what I believe happened.

Soon after Zimbabwe became independent, I accompanied Richard Luce on an official visit. In those days Robert Mugabe was regarded in a more favourable light than Joshua Nkomo, and he wasn't bad to begin with. I had a lot to do with establishing the British Military Mission sent to Zimbabwe to retrain the former terrorists and integrate them into the new army. Mugabe's 'freedom fighters' had *noms de guerre* like Spill Blood or Kill White. Many came back with their arms and it was a tricky situation. The British Military Mission had a very direct way of dealing with this. The drill sergeants from the Brigade of Guards had the ex-terrorists in the hot sun drilling, slow- and quick-marching up and down the parade ground, saluting and presenting arms in the normal British way - and of course about half of them quit. They said, "We're not going to soldier in this way" and they went back to their villages. The ones that remained actually turned into quite good soldiers and for a while it seemed that we were doing quite well. Unfortunately Mugabe used the army in the wrong way, but that came later. I think the big mistake in Zimbabwe was not to push ahead with buying out the white settlers, giving fair compensation.

MM: Could we have paid such a high price?

JS: If it had been done in the early 1980s, even generous compensation would not have cost a tithe of what has since been lost. If paid good compensation, the settlers would have given up their land. What the Zimbabweans wanted was the land. They didn't want the nice houses and the swimming

pools – indeed when seizing estates by force they often destroy the houses and burn all the equipment. I believe in the early days after independence they would have allowed the Europeans to stay on in their properties with two or three acres, provided they handed over the rest, the vast estates of hundreds of acres, to the Africans. Some might have stayed on for a while as farm managers or advisers to help keep the farms flourishing. What happened was that the settlers were lulled into a false sense of security because for some years nothing happened, and they began to feel they could stay there forever. Of course after ten years or so the thunderbolt hit them, but by then it was too late. If there had been a planned policy of compensation, buying out the settlers steadily and not too slowly, I think the whole problem could have been settled.

MM: We did that in Kenya and it was very expensive.

JS: Yes. But how expensive is Zimbabwe going to be when we have to start to get it on its feet again? We will be spending a lot of money helping whoever succeeds Mugabe, I'm sure. And if we'd spent a tenth of that at the right time, we would have avoided the whole economy collapsing.

MM: I wonder what the cost would have been? There were vastly more settlers in Rhodesia than there were in Kenya. The white settler population in Kenya was negligible really.

JS: But the land was worth more in Kenya. Land was less expensive in Zimbabwe after the war. It is too late now anyway, but I just think an opportunity was missed. Angola was another sad story. The South Africans have got a lot to answer for. They caused a lot of chaos ...

MM: If we'd attempted to buy out the settlers in Rhodesia would we not have been called upon to buy out the settlers in South Africa?

JS: No. We had no responsibility in South Africa, which had long since been independent. It was not a colony. Fortunately, or unfortunately, Southern Rhodesia was still a colony legally, and we had legal obligations.

MM: There had been internal self-government in Rhodesia since 1922.

JS: That was a purely constitutional arrangement under British law. Legally Southern Rhodesia was still a colony. Unfortunately the UN only recognises independence or non-independence.

There's no intermediate status. And if you are not independent you are regarded as a colony, as the Sultan of Brunei found. He was quite happy as a protected state. But he had to become independent like everybody else.

MM: But Brunei was always independent. It was an independent Islamic Sultanate in treaty relationship with the UK.

JS: That's what the British Government said, but the UN maintained that the relationship was the result of an 'unequal treaty'. The concept of an unequal treaty is that when the mighty British Empire under Queen Victoria made a deal with a tiny state like Brunei, that was an unequal treaty. Although the Sultan of Brunei was nominally a free agent, if he had not signed, Queen Victoria only had to nod and he'd be wiped out by the Royal Navy. This is what happened in Zanzibar.

MM: The situation in Brunei was that we wanted to make it independent, and the Sultan refused year after year to let us alter his status.

JS: That's what we told the UN.

MM: But it was true.

JS: The UN didn't believe us. They said he was a British puppet. Brunei was not unique, whatever the Sultan said. We had similar treaty relationships with Oman and the Arab sheikhs in the Gulf, and the UN would have none of it. We defended our position vigorously, but we were on a losing wicket, I'm afraid. And in the end the protected states all got their independence.

MM: Brunei wanted British protection.

JS: The UN didn't care.

MM: Now no one guarantees their independence against Malaysia.

JS: You are absolutely right. That was the British viewpoint, and it was not accepted by the majority in the United Nations. We had to decide whether we were going to go on being hit over the head by the United Nations or whether we had to tell the Sultan of Brunei to change his tack.

The only way Brunei could be in a dependent relationship with Britain and satisfy the UN would have been by the sort of scheme we suggested in the 1950s to Malta, the 'Home Office offer' I mentioned earlier. If Brunei had become technically a part of the United Kingdom and sent an MP to Parliament, that might have been accepted by the UN, but it would have created a precedent for other protected states – and probably colonies as well. Britain had these rather curious constitutional relationships which only lawyers understood, but which usually reflected a genuine wish by the ruler or people concerned to be in a 'protective' relationship with Britain. That was what I was saying about the relationship between the Colonial Office and the colonies, that it was in fact an amicable relationship. Tanganyika was a good example. There were only about 7,000 Europeans in a country with a population of 7 million Africans. So there was no way Britain was keeping Tanganyika under our control by force. We were there because the local people were content for us to rule them. They wanted our help and advice, and they liked us, but when Nyerere said "I love Edinburgh, I love Shakespeare, I love the British, but it's time for you to go. Goodbye." we went. There are a few who still say it was a shame that the British left. But Nyerere realised that he'd be called a British puppet if he allowed us to stay. He'd seen the warning signs and Tanganyika had to become independent. Even so, he had a mutiny in his army within a year or so. Britain had to give the colonies independence, even though the smallest would have been happy if we had carried on governing them. But that wasn't allowed. It's one of the ironies of history.

MM: I remember that in 1946 Sarawak had to be created a Crown colony, so that we could make it independent. We couldn't while it was still the property of Rajah Brooke.

JS: There were lots of anomalies, and everyone was happy with them except the United Nations. But unfortunately we had to deal with the UN.

Appointment as British High Commissioner to Tanzania, 1982-85

JS: Central Africa Department was a good introduction to becoming High Commissioner in Tanzania, which was offered to me in 1982, and I was glad to accept. Having been involved in the final stages of Tanganyika's move to independence at the Trusteeship Council and then visiting Dar es Salaam with the UN Committee on Decolonisation, I was keen to learn more about the country now called Tanzania. I was lucky because the Rhodesia problem, which had bedevilled relations between Britain and Tanzania for so many years, had at last been solved. Whereas my predecessors had been in the doghouse over Rhodesia, I was receiving congratulations from everybody from

Nyerere downwards for giving Zimbabwe independence. There was one fly in the ointment. Carrington and Mrs Thatcher had been very annoyed with Nyerere during the endless negotiations leading up to, and during, the Lancaster House conference which had agreed on Zimbabwe's independence. Britain was continually sending emissaries around Africa peddling the latest constitutional ideas for African majority rule. When they arrived in Mozambique, Machel would glance at the proposals and say "Excellent. Tell Mrs Thatcher that I agree". Machel knew that Mugabe had the guns and the men to prevail, so it didn't really matter what fancy constitutions the British produced. Nyerere on the other hand, being a man of peace and also knowing all about constitutions, would read the whole document carefully, even the fine print and the annexes. He would ask: "What about this reserve power for the Governor General? And what about these nominated members?" He'd nit-pick the details. He was only trying to be helpful but it would drive Carrington and Mrs Thatcher to distraction. So they decided to get their own back by stopping all aid to Tanzania. However, an aid programme is a bit like a supertanker – you can't stop it just like that. So although the decision to stop all aid was taken in 1979/80, it only began to take effect when I arrived in 1982. A great start to my mission, to discover the aid programme had stopped. "Thank you very much, Mrs Thatcher". And of course Nyerere knew nothing about this. He genuinely thought he'd been constructive with his comments and had played a useful role. And he was delighted with Mrs Thatcher for giving Zimbabwe independence. So I telegraphed to the FCO: "There is no way I can possibly explain to the Tanzanian Government that we are discontinuing our aid. Zimbabwe has been independent for two years and in any case Nyerere thinks he helped the Lancaster House process." Not only would Nyerere be puzzled and angry but there were serious implications for a massive road project we were building to link the Tanzam Highway with southern Tanzania.

MM: There was going to be a railway link to Zambia?

JS: A road and a railway. The Americans built the Tanzam road from Dar es Salaam to Zambia and the Chinese built the Tazara railway alongside it. The road and railway opened up the centre of Tanzania, but much of the south was still virtually without roads. Ruvuma, a very large province over by Malawi, is the bread basket of Tanzania. It is very fertile, being near Lake Nyasa, with a good climate and using intensive farming methods on hillsides. They produced lots of crops, but in the 1970s they couldn't get them out because of the lack of roads. People were starving in Dodoma and there were shortages in Dar es Salaam but in Ruvuma the farmers were stuck with surplus crops. So the plan was to build a decent road, linking Songea, the capital of Ruvuma, with the

Tanzam Highway at a place called Makambako. The project was called the Makambako-Songea Road, and the ODA – the British aid ministry – had agreed to build this road. The first section was from Makambako to a village with the unfortunate name of Wino, which happened to be the halfway point to Songea. By the time I arrived the first section had been completed and the contractors were poised to build the second section to Songea. But the effect of the Carrington decision to stop all aid meant that the road would stop at Wino [laughter]. We would be a laughing stock. Wino was a few mud huts in the middle of nowhere. I put up a good fight to complete the road and fortunately an old chum from the Colonial Office, Sir William Ryrie, had become Permanent Secretary to the Ministry of Overseas Development. So he came out and agreed with me that it was ludicrous to stop half way. In fact the ODA not only agreed to complete the project but also had a new idea. Instead of upgrading the existing road, as they had done for the first section, they simply disregarded the old dirt road and made a fresh new road through virgin country to Songea, in half the time and at half the cost. Prince Charles, wearing his hat as chairman of the Commonwealth Development Corporation, came to visit the Njombe CDC wattle project nearby in 1983. He also declared open the first half of the road and unveiled a plaque at Wino to mark the halfway point. And in December 1985 (literally my last week in Tanzania), Princess Anne came to Songea to be present at the ceremony marking the completion of the road. The Makambako/Songea Road is something I'm very proud of because it made a permanent difference to Tanzania. Diplomacy has its moments. The Road improved the lives of many Tanzanians for many years.

MM: This would have been under the Overseas Development Administration, under Christopher Patten?

JS: Patten was Minister later, when I was in Geneva. Since his time, the administration of aid has got totally out of control. I think most of the FCO would agree. The Colonial Office in the old days administered aid programmes through what we called the subject departments which dealt with agriculture, transport, social services and so on. Those departments were hived off in 1961 to create the Ministry of Overseas Development. At first this worked satisfactorily, but over the years the aid programme has in my view lacked political direction. In Tanzania there is now a large aid office and a small High Commission. I think that is the wrong way round.

MM: Just to reach this mythical target of spending 0.7% of GNP on aid, anything goes.

JS: I'm all in favour of the right sort of aid like building roads. An example of the wrong sort of aid in Tanzania was what was called the million pound house. This was before my time, in 1980. The ODA awarded a contract to Wimpey to design low cost housing for Dodoma, the new capital of Tanzania. The idea was that Wimpey would send out some experts to see the local conditions, design a model low-cost house and then build as many houses as they could within a total budget of a million pounds. By the time expensive consultants had flown out to Tanzania and been provided with houses, cars, servants, education allowances and so on, they were only able to design and build one low cost house before the million pounds ran out. This was the most expensive low cost house in Tanzania. I'm afraid this sort of thing is happening now all over the place. DFID have not learnt the lesson. Just think how much the overblown aid mission in Dar must be costing.

My time in Tanzania was marked by the changeover from Nyerere, who had been President for 25 years, to Mwinyi. Most people know Nyerere was at Edinburgh University; not many know that Mwinyi was at Durham University and was very pro-British. He's now the Patron of the Britain-Tanzania Society. Although Tanzania was a one-party state it was a very democratic election with a lot of electioneering, a lot of politicking and so on. I organised a farewell visit for Nyerere to London. It wasn't a State visit, because he'd had one already. It went very well, with a very good luncheon at Buckingham Palace and a most interesting meeting with Margaret Thatcher.

MM: Is there a story?

JS: Yes. Nyerere and his entourage were welcomed by Mrs Thatcher and we all sat rather informally around the fireplace, not at a table. The recent meeting between America, the Western countries and the Third World in Mexico - the Cancun Summit - was on Mrs Thatcher's mind; I think she'd been annoyed by something that happened there. So she said to Nyerere "Good to see you, Julius, haven't seen you since Cancun. You must tell me all about what's been happening in Tanzania since then." Nyerere opened his mouth to reply, but before he could say a word, she said "I think I know what you're going to say, Julius" – and she then spoke for about forty minutes nonstop. When she finally asked him another question, she interrupted to tell him what she thought before he could get more than two sentences out. It was not going well; we'd been there about an hour, and there was a big formal lunch timed for 12.30. About 12.25 the advisers started slipping out and Mrs Thatcher suddenly said "By the way, what's happening on the disarmament negotiations?" She had spotted in her briefing that Nyerere and four or five major non-aligned countries were working on some important disarmament initiative which Mrs Thatcher was

obviously interested in. So Nyerere began telling her exactly what was going on and for once she was listening intently. They went on for about twenty minutes with Nyerere doing the talking, while everyone else waited to go into the dining room and wondered what was going on. Eventually she walked in with Julius, both of them smiling broadly. Although she had started so badly by not giving Nyerere a chance, when she realised that he might have something to say, she gave him her full attention. She should have done it half an hour earlier. She was a great character but had one or two little foibles.

MM: Before we leave Tanzania, could I just ask you to comment on the suggestion that Nyerere made a greater success of managing Tanzania as compared to the way that Kenya was developed and turned into a magnet for mass tourism and invisible earnings. Now Tanzania has the game reserves in more or less pristine condition and the lack of mass tourism has made it a much more interesting and attractive place for eco-tourism?

JS: Tanzania was not keen on tourism, so their game reserves are much less developed and are really much more interesting than those in Kenya. The downside was that the relative failure of Tanzania economically was partly because they didn't develop tourism. It's always a delicate balance. I think Tanzania probably got it about right, although they are now developing Zanzibar – a beautiful place but politically quite difficult. Another difference between Tanzania and Kenya is the greater political stability of Tanzania. I always felt that Tanzania was a comfortable place to be, but whenever I went to Nairobi I felt a little bit uneasy and nervous. In Tanzania everybody was really very friendly even in the remotest places.

One reason for this is that Tanzania does not have a tribal problem. In Kenya there are a few large tribes, Kikuyu, Luo and so on, who tend to rub each other up the wrong way. Tanzania has many small tribes, and even the largest, the Sukuma is only 8%, so no single tribe tries to lord it over the others. A second contribution to stability under Nyerere was the one party system. I had some debates with the FCO about this, because I was a great defender of the one party system as it existed in Tanzania. The origin of the one party system was because Nyerere was so popular that no other party could stand a chance, and secondly because Nyerere feared that a multiparty system might cause divisions on religious lines between Christians and Moslems. In fact, although there was only one party in my time, the elections – or rather the primary elections to choose the official CCM candidates – were quite bitterly fought. The general election itself was a foregone conclusion for the CCM party; but in the primary elections even Ministers and senior CCM officials could be

defeated. I remember John Malacela, who had been Prime Minister and High Commissioner in London, lost the primary for Dodoma and was out. He managed to get back in due course, but the Tanzanian electorate was quite sophisticated. They made sure they became party members so as to have a vote in the primary elections; they could thus get rid of unpopular ministers or party hacks. In its own way it was a democratic system. Under British and American pressure Tanzania introduced a multiparty system - after my time - but to be honest it hasn't been a wild success; the opposition parties found it hard to get their act together. A final interesting feature in Tanzania was the position of the armed forces. The British tradition is that the army should keep out of politics. This goes back to the Civil War – Cromwell and all that. In many African countries the army sees the politicians making a mess of things and imposes military rule. Nyerere had had the problem of the army mutiny in 1964, so to prevent further interference by the army he integrated it into the political system. There would always be a general in the cabinet, and not just as Minister of Defence but as Minister of Home Affairs or some other ministry. But as well as having a military officer in the Cabinet, he'd have generals as provincial governors and more junior officers as district commissioners. Kikwete, the present President, started off as a military officer in the district administration. As the military were integrated with the administration and the government, there was less risk of them standing aloof and saying 'the politicians have made a mess so we'll take over'. They were part of the system, so there's never, so far and fortunately, a military coup in Tanzania. That's one of Nyerere's legacies.

MM: Thank you very much for that. So should we now move on to your time in Geneva?

Appointment as UK Permanent Representative to the UN, Geneva, 1985-90.

JS: I was very happy in Tanzania, but it was time to move on and I hoped for a European appointment. Anne Warburton, an old friend from my New York days, took early retirement in order to become the Principal of Lucy Cavendish College in Cambridge and this created an unexpected vacancy in Geneva. The idea of getting back to the United Nations appealed to me very much. I had started with the UN in New York, so it seemed appropriate to finish my diplomatic career with the UN in Geneva. It's not well known that the UN has a large presence in Geneva. The League of Nations was established there in 1920 and had just completed splendid new offices in 1938 when the war broke out. The Swiss were left with these lovely buildings in Geneva, and it seemed a shame not to use them. So when the United Nations was created in 1945, it was agreed that the political headquarters of the UN would be in New York – Security Council; General

Assembly and so on – but that much of the economic, social and humanitarian work of the UN would be based in Geneva. This included the Human Rights division, the UN High Commission for Refugees, the Economic Commission for Europe, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and the World Trade Organisation (known in my time as GATT). Geneva also had the five main ‘specialised agencies’ - the World Health Organisation, the International Labour Organisation, the World Meteorological Organisation, the International Telecommunications Union and the World Intellectual Property Organisation. Finally there were the International Committee of the Red Cross (which despite its name is a purely Swiss organisation), the League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the World Council of Churches and CERN (with the famous hadron collider). So there was plenty of activity in Geneva. Most of these organisations had annual conferences or ad hoc high level meetings, and British Ministers would attend: Geoffrey Howe and Chris Patten came for refugee discussions, Ken Clarke came to the ILO as Minister of Labour and then to the WHO as Minister of Health, Alan Clark attended UNCTAD and so on. In my previous posts it was rare to see Ministers unless they were from the FCO or the ODA. Geneva was also used for highly confidential political talks, as the participants felt more comfortable in the discreet and relatively media-free atmosphere of Geneva, rather than in the spotlight of publicity in New York. We had the talks in 1988 which brought the Russian occupation of Afghanistan to an end but which sadly did not include Afghan representatives. The Russian withdrawal should have led to a big UN aid programme coordinated by the Sadruddin Aga Khan, but the whole thing foundered on the Taliban. There were important talks between Iran and Iraq over the ending of the Iran/Iraq war. There were also discreet talks between the Iran and the British government over the re-establishment of diplomatic relations. One stumbling block was the Iranian wish to re-open their consulate in Manchester but the Manchester police and City council were opposed to this. The talks were held in my house (round the dining table) to avoid media attention. Sadly, like so many other things with Iran, the agreement reached soon ran into difficulties – I think it might have been due to the Salman Rushdie affair.

The International Red Cross had a right under the Geneva Convention to visit war zones, prisoner of war camps and so on. Their observers were highly respected, and very active, and being entirely Swiss (and neutral) they could go where other countries feared to tread. When Cornelio Sommaruga was appointed President of the Red Cross in 1986, I arranged for him to be invited to London as an official government guest. A contentious issue at that time was whether the Red Cross would be allowed to visit the Maze Prison in Northern Ireland where IRA suspects were being detained. There had been demonstrations and hunger strikes in the Maze Prison, and the

Northern Ireland Office was keen not to have a Red Cross inspection. So this visit to London looked like being a bit tricky. I was even more concerned when I saw the draft programme, as Sommaruga's first engagement was with the Northern Ireland Secretary, Tom King – and at the rather inconvenient time of 9 am on Monday morning. I tried to get it shifted to later in the week, or at least later in the day, but this wasn't possible. So I said "At least let's make sure that Mr Sommaruga has no problem with security when he arrives at the Northern Ireland Office (it was a time when the IRA were very active). Let's make sure that the protocol goes well". I was assured that everything would be fine and that the Minister's Private Secretary would be there to meet Sommaruga's car when he arrived at Admiralty House where the Northern Ireland Office was. Unfortunately no one told the security guards, so despite the Minister's Private Secretary arguing and threatening, they would not let Sommaruga's car in and I could see Sommaruga was getting angrier and angrier. When we finally breached the security and got to the conference room, I was sure that the meeting was going to be a disaster. But as soon as Tom King walked into the room and saw Sommaruga, he cried out "Cornelio!" and Sommaruga exclaimed "Tom!" They embraced warmly and it turned out that they were both keen skiers; Sommaruga, before being appointed to the Red Cross, had been with the Swiss parliamentary team, while King was with the British parliamentary team. They chatted for about five minutes about old times and then King, without looking at his briefing notes, said: "We'd better get down to business. What can we do for you? Do you want anything?" Sommaruga, hardly believing his luck said "Well we'd actually like with your agreement to visit the Maze Prison". And King replied: "That seems a modest enough request. I think we can agree to that, can't we?" – turning to his Permanent Secretary. The Permanent Secretary started to expostulate and point to the brief, but King said "Come on. We know Sommaruga. He'll be all right". So the Red Cross got their visit to the Maze Prison. In fact the inspection went very well, and all thanks to skiing.

Geneva is a beautiful city and we were fortunate to have a pleasant house overlooking the lake, so I was grateful to the FCO for an interesting and active final posting.

MM: Thank you very much.

Transcribed by Evie Jamieson

23.3.11